

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WHILE WE'RE YOUNG:
TALKS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

DREAMS AND REALITIES
PRACTICAL PAPERS ON
CHRISTIAN LIVING

OLD WORLD STORIES
RE-TOLD FOR TO-DAY

HANDBOOK ON THE
ATONEMENT

A VETERAN IN REVIVAL:
R. C. MORGAN: HIS LIFE & TIMES

SUNDAY TALKS WITH
BOYS AND GIRLS

OLD BIBLE CHARACTERS

DRAWN WITH
A MODERN PEN

BY

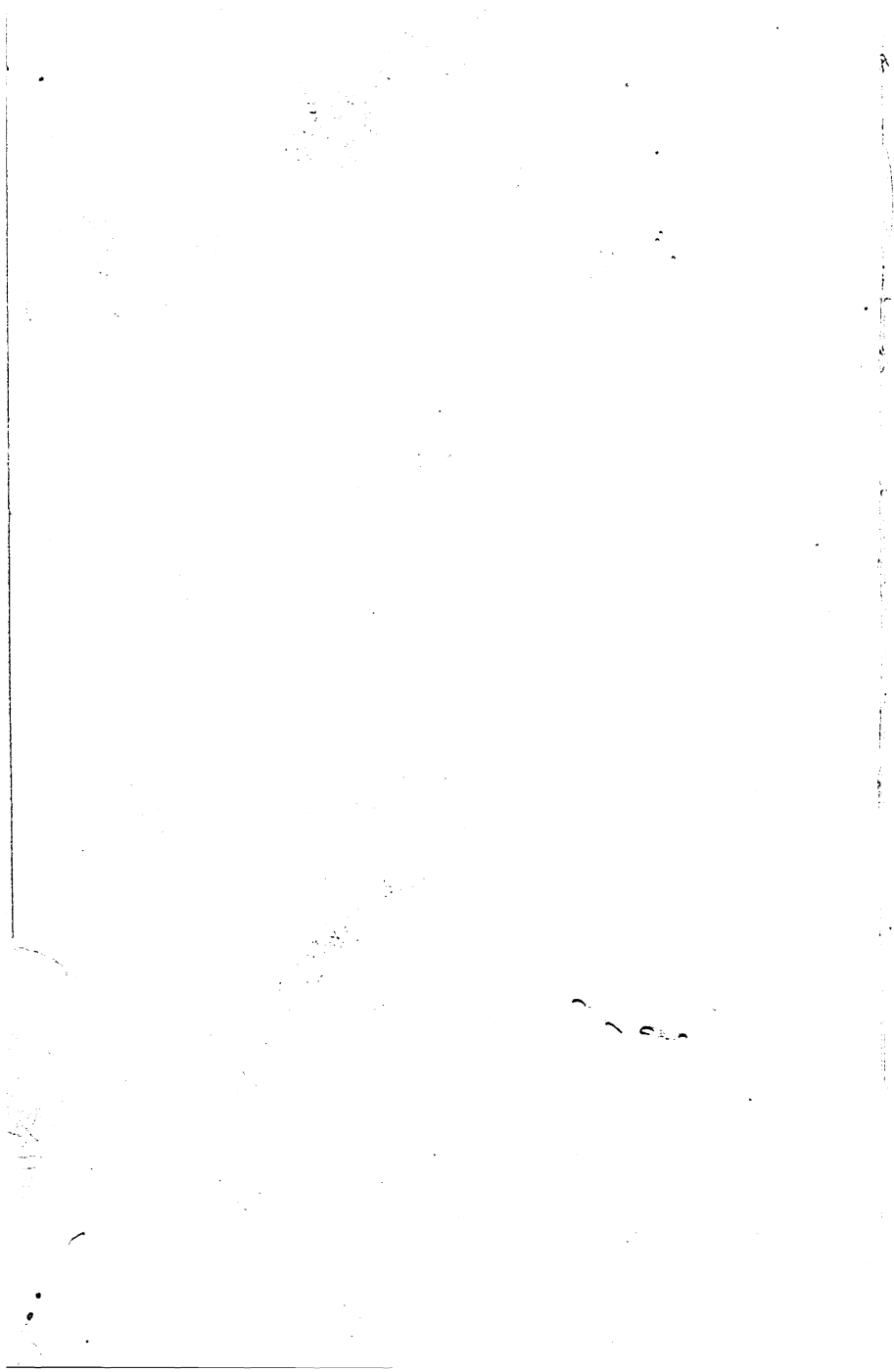
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"OLD WORLD STORIES" "HANDBOOK ON THE ATONEMENT"
"SUNDAY TALKS WITH BOYS AND GIRLS" ETC.

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OLD BIBLE CHARACTERS

DRAWN WITH A MODERN PEN

CHAPTER I

ADAM AND EVE

THE GARDEN AND THE FALL

WHEN we read, in the first chapter of Genesis, of all the wonderful things that God did to make this world possible for man to live in, we naturally think of His GREATNESS and His POWER. Everything was done on such a big scale. Day and night, earth and sea, sun and moon—there is such a mighty, world-wide sweep about it all! Yet we find He is just as much God of the little things; for while He made the sun and moon, “He made the stars also”; together with “great whales” were ordinary and tiny fish; and side by side with “the beast of the field” was “every creeping thing.” One and all He made “very good,” the least as perfect of its kind as the greatest.

"The Lord God Planted a Garden."

Then He turned from the vast expanse of air and earth and sky, and "planted a garden." I like that; it seems to bring Him near to us. A garden reminds us of home, and home suggests a father. There is something tender and intimate in the thought that God planted a garden for Adam and Eve to enjoy. They might have felt so lost and small in the great wide universe; but in the garden they could feel quite at home. That is just what He meant them to be. And they were "to dress it and keep it"; as a child will take special care of that little piece of garden that he calls his very own.

"I don't like this big room, Mummy," said a little boy, as he stood in the drawing-room of the house in which he lived.

"Why not, dear?" asked his mother.

"Well, Mummy, there is such a lot in it that has nothing to do with *me*!" was his reply.

His thoughts were in the nursery, among his toys and treasures. He always felt so much more at home up there than in the drawing-room, which was mostly reserved for adult guests and special occasions. Nor was it only a matter of toys; for the nursery was especially the place where he and "Mummy" could talk

of his childish interests, and he could enjoy her love. She seemed ever so much nearer and dearer to him there than when she was entertaining visitors in the big room downstairs. The whole house was his home, but the nursery was the really "homey" part to him.

I think Adam and Eve must have felt like that in the Garden of Eden. It was their very own—the place that God had set apart in His great world for their special use and enjoyment. It had no nettles or briars or thorns; but lovely trees and flowers, fruits and food, animals and birds, and a flowing, shining river—all for their comfort and happiness, and nothing to grieve them or annoy. Each of their five senses found gratification there.

All this would make them acquainted, not only with God's power and greatness, but with His GOODNESS and His LOVE. Can you not hear them say, "How kind God is!" as they spent their days together in that beautiful garden, the first and best in all the world? And sometimes God Himself would come and talk to them, teaching them what they did not know, and explaining things they did not understand—reminding us of that other garden where "Jesus oft-times resorted with His

disciples" (John xviii. 1). Thus Adam and Eve came to know God, not only as the great Creator, but as their Father, full of tenderness and love.

That, surely, is what He wants to be to each of us. "The living God giveth us richly all things to enjoy," said St. Paul to Timothy; and St. James tells us that "every good and perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father." He may seem very far away from us when we think of Him as "the living God"; but as "our Father" we may feel quite at home with Him. And as He planted a garden in the great universe for Adam and Eve to cultivate and care for, so He has made a special niche in the big world for you and me—

"You in your small corner
And I in mine—"

not only that we may enjoy His bountiful gifts ("life and breath and all things," as St. Paul calls them), but also that we may think of Him as our loving Father, the Divine Giver of them all.

One day Jesus said to His disciples: "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." God did not wait for Adam and Eve to ask for a garden; probably they never thought of it. But He knew it

would be good for them, just as He knew it would be good for Adam to have Eve for a companion; so in His love He provided both, that they might be happy. And that is His desire for all His children. Shall we not thank Him for all His kindly thoughts and gifts, and live to please Him in the little garden of our lives in which His love has placed us?

The Mystery of Love.

I can imagine Adam and Eve saying to each other: "Why should God trouble to make stars, when the sun and moon already give so much greater light? Why create fish in the sea for food, when there is abundance of food on land? Why make creeping things, when there are so many bigger and more beautiful?" There is a good deal of mystery about all God's plans and purposes, both in creation and in our lives. He—

". . . moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

But He answers those mysteries with another—the *mystery of His love*. Just as the (supposed) questions of Adam and Eve were answered by the garden, so He answers ours by the Garden of Gethsemane, where the love of Jesus was

poured out before He suffered on the Cross. We may often find ourselves questioning God's purposes. Never forget that the answer to them all lies in *His love*.

The Tempter.

There was only one restriction that God placed upon Adam and Eve in their beautiful garden. He had said to Adam: "Of every tree of the garden thou *mayest freely* eat"—except one; "thou shalt *not* eat" of that. Does God's love seem to contradict itself in this? Not at all; for He permitted Adam and Eve to eat of every tree that would do them good, and forbade only that which would do them harm. There was, therefore, just as much love in the restriction as in the permission; for God intended only what was best for them, whether by a *Yes* or a *No*. But while He never swerved from His desire for their happiness, He also never swerved from His claim to their obedience; which, after all, was only for their good, and to avoid what would be for their unhappiness. It was quite untrue to suggest, as Satan did, that God had forbidden them to "eat of the *trees* of the garden," for He had forbidden only *one*. It is well for us to

realise—and the earlier the better—that there is quite as much love in “Thou shalt not” as in “Thou mayest,” whether the words are spoken by God in the Bible, or by parents and teachers in home and school; for each has only our truest interests at heart.

Look at the pair of scales the merchant keeps upon his desk to weigh his letters, or that a cook uses in the kitchen. How do they work? The weights are placed upon the one side, and the letter or the food upon the other; when both sides are equal, you have what is called a just balance. So God placed, as it were, the permission in the one scale and the restriction in the other; and perfect was the balance of His *Yes* and of His *No*.

But put a weight on one side of the scale and nothing on the other; or the weight and the thing to be weighed both on the same side—and no just balance shall we find. That is pretty much what Satan did when he tempted Eve. It was as if he said: “Take away the restriction altogether; why should you be troubled with it? Or better still, put what you *may* eat and what you *may not* all together on the same scale, and you will have *more* enjoyment instead of less.” Thus did the tempter

UPSET THE BALANCE between God's permission and restriction, His *Yes* and His *No*. Adam and Eve yielded to the evil suggestion, and they were *never so happy again!*

How plausible Satan was when he told Eve that if she ate the forbidden fruit she would be *better and wiser* than she was already, by knowing evil as well as good! What he did not tell her was, that with the temptation he was putting into her heart *the wish to prefer the wrong*. As well might we offer a person bread in which poison had been secretly mixed, or send sailors on a voyage in a ship with an explosive hidden in the hold. All temptation is like that. On the outside it looks "pleasant to the eyes" and "good for food"; but concealed within it is that which will poison the mind, destroy the character, and lure the soul to sin.

Is it any wonder that God had said: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"? Satan denied that, yet Adam and Eve proved its truth. Their innocence was killed, their peace of mind was blighted, their happiness withered away. They might as well have been dead and buried there and then, for all the joy they could ever find in their lovely garden again. When God visited them on that same evening,

instead of welcoming Him as they had so often done, they hid among the trees, shaking with fear at the sound of His voice. Sin had followed the temptation, and there is no room for sin and happiness to dwell together. Have we not found it so in the garden of our hearts?

When he tempts us, Satan always tells us—as he told Eve—that there are *advantages in yielding*. He makes promises that he never keeps, puts the “pleasant” side well to the front, and hides the bitter consequences from our view. At the core of Eve’s apple (or whatever fruit it may have been) was “the worm that dieth not,” and she only discovered it when too late. But the devil knew it was there all the time; and instead of becoming more like God, as he promised, she became more unlike Him than she ever was before.

I have often wondered which word the tempter emphasised when he said: “Thou shalt not surely die.” Was it the word “*not*”? If so, it was a blank denial of God’s truthfulness, which ought to have put Eve upon her guard. Or was it the word “surely”—“Thou shalt not *surely* die”? If so, it was as much as to say: “You cannot be *sure* that you will die; you may, or you may not.

Eat and chance it!" And is not that how most temptations come? "You may be found out, or you may not; yield and take the risk; with luck you may escape the consequences!" But though you may gain the pleasure of the moment by yielding, you lose the peace of mind, the strength of character, the sense of freedom, the enjoyment of true happiness. For Conscience will not let you rest. Sin must be confessed, forgiven, and forsaken, ere you can have peace again.

So the disobedience of Adam and Eve turned their lovely garden into a wilderness, put thorns upon their roses, and briars in their lives. And ever since, the brambles have entangled human lives, and enmeshed the feet of young and old alike.

Remember, however, that temptation itself is not sin. We sin only when we yield. But why should we yield, when God will keep us from doing so, if we ask Him? And why should we so desire the forbidden thing, when He gives us *so much else* to enjoy? In pleasing Him we shall find the greatest joy; for the way of disobedience is a hard road to travel, while His ways are paths of peace and pleasantness all the time.

CHAPTER II

CAIN AND ABEL

THE WATERSMEET OF CHARACTER

WHEN thistledown begins to fly about, it is not long before many thistles appear instead of one ; and the evil seed that Satan sowed in the Garden of Eden took root in the home of Adam and Eve (Gen. iv.). When Cain was born, his mother named him "Gotten from the Lord." But if his temper as a child was anything like it appeared when he was a man, Eve must have felt she had been too previous in her estimate, which was largely discounted later on. When Abel was added to the family, perhaps it was in the hope that he would not be a second edition of his sulky brother that she christened him, "A meadow"; and his sunny disposition seemed amply to justify her choice. For children begin to show at a very early age whether they are likely to be happy or cross, a pleasure or a pain. We need no microscope to detect the

embryonic germs of original sin or of pleasing grace.

Judging by his later years, I should say Cain was one of those elder brothers of whom some younger ones have far from pleasing recollections—brothers who use their superior strength in snatching the toys of others and holding tight to their own; who think it is fun to pinch, and manly to strike and kick. I don't fancy that as a lad Abel had a very fruity time when the son and heir was showing off!

Cain was born *under the shadow of his parents' sin*, and he never forgot it. In his heart he blamed them for it; and the more he thought about it, the more he grumbled at such a darksome heritage. For this, at least, we may surely pity him. Yet Abel had the same heritage; and the difference between the two boys—and men—was, that Cain looked ever backward, Abel forward. Cain's thought was: "How different it might have been!" Abel's: "It shall be different yet!" Both would have heard from Eve the sad story of the Fall; but Cain laid all the stress upon how she had yielded to the tempter, while Abel laid the emphasis upon God's wonderful promise that some day Satan's head should be

bruised and his evil power destroyed. In the ardour of youth, he may even have hoped that he himself might be the one to slay the dragon.

So it came to this. Cain lived under the cloud and made up his mind there was no way out of it. Abel realised as much as his brother how dark that cloud was, but felt sure there must be a way out, and if possible he would find it. Cain the pessimist, Abel the optimist: the whole story is explained by just that divergence in their outlook. To each was given the opportunity to choose between good and evil; then came the parting of the ways, the watersmeet of character, of which their offerings were a certain sign.

The Two Offerings.

So when each brought an offering to the Lord, with such widely different results, we may wonder at first sight why the one was rejected and the other accepted by God. But there was a great difference in—

THE KIND OF OFFERING.—Cain's was "fruit," the very thing that had caused his parents' fall; and "of the ground," the very thing that was already "cursed" because of Adam's sin. Abel's was "of the flock," for he perceived, however dimly, that sin could be forgiven only

through sacrifice; and "by faith" (Heb. xi. 4) he came gradually to understand that the One who at last should "bruise the serpent's head" was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29).

THE QUALITY OF OFFERING.—It does not appear that Cain made any special selection in what he brought. His action seemed to imply that anything was good enough for a God whom he did not love. Abel brought "firstlings" and the "fat," the very best he had, for he felt that nothing could be too good as an offering to a gracious Deity.

THE SPIRIT OF THE OFFERER.—Each brought his offering as an act of worship. But Cain regarded God as a sort of fetish, only to be feared: Abel saw in Him a Father, greatly to be loved. To Cain, it was a matter of duty, which brought no joy to himself and no pleasure to God; he offered it with a high hand, and flung it down with an air of pride and almost of defiance, with no sense of his own unworthiness. Abel brought his humbly, lovingly, with his whole heart in the gift, wishing he had more to offer; with a true sorrow for sin and a deep faith in the remedy. It was not sin, but its consequences to himself, that

troubled Cain. Abel realised how abhorrent sin is to God, and could not rest until, in his own case at least, it was forgiven and put away. Cain's spirit was that of Saul, who said: "I *forced* myself and offered." Abel was the "cheerful giver," beloved of the Lord.

For these reasons God accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's. The key to the problem lies in *the characters of the men*. "Cain was of that wicked one; his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John iii. 12). God not only sees what we do and how we do it, but knows the why and wherefore of the act. It was the men themselves, and not their offerings only, that were taken into account. Even if Cain had brought the same kind and quality of offering as his brother's, it would have been marred by the spirit in which he brought it. For God judges motive, as well as character (Prov. xxix. 3; Jas. iv. 6-8).

But Cain's sullen face glowed with anger, and his heart "burned exceedingly" (that is the literal meaning of ver. 4). Nor did it cool down though God so gently reasoned with him. If, even then, he would do the right thing in the right spirit, he would be "accepted," as Abel was. Grievously as he had sinned—not

only in the proud spirit of his offering, but in his daily conduct—it was still open to him to bring a sin-offering in repentance; and if he did so, he would defeat Satan's "desire" to destroy him (see ver. 7, margin). With great patience God gave him *another chance* to redeem the past; but he would not take it. Turning his back upon the door of hope thus opened to him, Cain lured his brother into a lonely field, under the pretence of kindly converse with him, and there he slew him. And this within a short time of professing to worship God! It is by our actions outside, not inside, our place of worship that our true spirit is revealed; and God has some very serious things to say to those who "honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark vii. 9).

And how did it all begin? For be sure of this, Cain did not become a murderer all at once. May we not assume that his great sin, as a man, grew out of small beginnings as a boy? Selfish, surly, sulky, morose, his disposition reminds me of a verse in my first nursery-book:—

"It *was* a cross old cat!
'Twas never seen to play:
And if you stroked it on the back,
It *gr-ow-led*, and walked away!"

The boy with a surly temper is ever likely to become a sinful man. Cain was *all wrong inside*. There lay the root of all the trouble. His self was so big that it shut out all sight of God. His spirit was soured, his heart malarious; he looked at everything from a false and feverish standpoint. As Jesus said: "Out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders," and other evil things.

There is only one cure. David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." He was sure of this: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 10-17). Whatever our faults and failings, our shortcomings and sins, they can only be cured "by faith" in Jesus, God's appointed sacrifice. And for the rest, who would not rather be like Abel, bright as "a meadow" in the sunshine, than like his sinful brother?

There is yet more to be said about Abel than that, for "he, being dead, yet speaketh" (Heb. xi. 4). God often begins where man leaves off; and Abel gained a new lease of life at the moment that he died at his brother's hand. Cain thought he had finished him off for good and all, but it was just then that

Abel's power for influencing future generations came to its birth. The man was dead, but his spirit was reborn; and the Divine truth for which he died, as the world's first martyr, found its fulfilment in the Lord Christ, whose redeeming blood "speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. xii. 24).

The Abel Memorial.

Nor was the value of his faithful witness lost upon the generations that lay between the human type and the Divine Antitype. At some remote period after his death, it was realised that a great man had lived and died among men, one whose memory was worthy of honour; and they erected a monument as a continual reminder of the holy principle for which he had given his life. Twelve centuries after Abel's death, this memorial stood on the property of a man named Joshua the Bethshemite (1 Sam. vi. 18). It would be interesting to know if this obscure landed proprietor had inherited the ground from his forbears, or had purchased it in appreciation of its historic relic; and whether he treasured the latter merely as a curiosity or from a sense of its spiritual values. One thing is certain—

that not only Israel's friends, but their enemies also, had its message forced upon their attention. When the Philistines, plagued beyond endurance on account of their possession of the Ark of the Covenant which they had captured from Israel, decided to rid themselves of that uncomfortable spoil, it was at "the great stone of Abel in the field of Joshua the Bethshemite" that they laid it down. Thus did Abel come to be strangely associated with the blood-sprinkled mercy seat—that portion of the Ark which betokened the efficacy of DIVINE ATONEMENT.

And that message is voiced among us still. It is heard by men of varying creed and habit, by Philistine or penitent, sinner or saint. Accepted or rejected, it re-echoes in unexpected places, at unexpected times, and refuses to be silenced. For it is the voice of Love, the Love that will not let men go until they have *forced* themselves beyond its reach. Its appeal we cannot escape. Hear it we must, whether we will or no. And by our decision concerning it will be shaped our eternal destiny.

It is so with the Gospel of Redeeming Grace. Men thought to evade the issue by

making away with the Divine Redeemer. "By wicked hands He was crucified and slain." But the tomb could hold neither the Master nor the message. For twenty centuries His voice has sounded forth "like bells at evening pealing," speaking "better things" than Abel ever knew. The shepherd-saint was powerless to avoid the fatal blow; but the Shepherd-Saviour laid down His life of Himself, for none could take it from Him (John x. 18).

Like those of old, the men of to-day perforce must hear the resounding voice of Atoning Love. "The great stone of Abel" has been replaced by the greater memorial of the Cross. There they must foregather, to flout the message or obey it. Subterfuge or evasion will not avail, for Calvary is a place for decisions which none can finally escape. On that sacred Mount, Christ finished the work that Abel had begun. There "He died for our sins according to the Scriptures." By that truth we shall be justified, or by it we shall be condemned.

CHAPTER III

THE TWO ENOCHS

SHADOW AND SUNSHINE

OF all the Bible-readers who know there was one Enoch, I wonder how many have ever thought of his earlier namesake tucked away in a corner where very few find him; living in a retirement for which there may be a stronger reason than at first meets the eye; a shy person with very little to say for himself, and perhaps for that very reason he thought the more.

ENOCH THE FIRST

What is recorded of him? Admittedly, not much. He adds no direct contribution to Bible history beyond the fact that he had a son from whose stock, a few generations later, we gain a glimpse of the tardy progress of civilisation in those early centuries—experts,

OLIV, in thoroughbred cattle-raising, and respectively, albeit less profitable, arts of music in the finer mechanics. These men were Jabal, and applied Tubal-cain (Gen. iv. 18-22): Jubal, and his heritage.

A Gloomy being this obscure Enoch, however,

In study in from inference much that we lack we can gain information. He was the son of by way of that significant fact has no small Cain, and upon his life and character. We have bearing noted how Cain and Abel were born already the dark shadow of their parents' sin. under theed under the still blacker cloud of Enoch lives crime. The son of a murderer—his father's heritage be worse than that? Cain can any find some prevision that his outrageous himself had inevitably tend to his own exceed would respectable society—"I shall be conclusion fromd a vagabond in the earth; every a fugitive and death me shall slay me" (iv. 14); one that find consent a dangerous man, not fit by universal decent people, if indeed to live at to mix with all. Oh! Imagine being born under

Poor Enoch's. Picture what it meant to such conditions them, with the cruel finger of grow up among

scorn ever pointing him out as "the son of that wicked old scoundrel Cain," and bitter tongues calling him venomous names as he passed along. Victimised as a boy by the malicious words and deeds of which some other boys are capable, long before he grew to the age of an adult the iron had burnt deeply into his soul. Was it not enough to cow the spirit of any sensitive nature? And might he not reasonably fear lest he himself might one day fall a prey to relentless hate and pay a vicarious penalty for his father's crime?

Incidentally, we may ask: Who were the men of whom Cain had been so afraid? We are told that his youngest brother, Seth, was given of God to his parents, "instead of Abel whom Cain slew" (iv. 25), obviously at no very distant date from that ghastly deed. The family line of Seth (chap. v.) was prolific in descendants, the chief of whom lived for hundreds of years. In each case the name of the eldest son alone is recorded (for genealogical purposes), together with an unstated number of other and anonymous "sons and daughters." Adam was a hundred and thirty when Seth was born, and lived eight hundred years after; he, too, "begat sons and

daughters" (v. 3, 4), whose children, in successive generations, had helped to people the world before and after the birth of Seth. Thus there were numerous children and grandchildren of Adam and Eve living contemporary with Cain and Enoch. And the additional fact that Cain "builded a city" (iv. 17), and called it by his son's name, presupposes a population to inhabit it. Thus there were ample grounds for Cain's terror lest his life should be held forfeit at the hands of near or distant relatives, either from a crude sense of justice or rough-and-ready revenge.

Beneath such a lowering cloud, then, Enoch the First was born, with a grim inheritance under the weight of which the stoutest heart might reasonably quail.

"And Cain builded a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch." What do we gather from that? The general rule, as indicated by Scripture, was that men who built cities named them after themselves, as a monument of their own enterprise; and the builder of a city installed himself as its chief ruler. There are other cities mentioned whose founders remain anonymous. But I can recall no other instance of a Biblical

city being named after a man who definitely was not its builder. It was the father's project, not the son's. For Cain's name was too sadly tarnished and his reputation too besmirched to attain the usual honours of a city-builder and the high position they entailed. So he relegated them to his son. But though Enoch's name was in the scheme, his heart was not. Given a free choice, he would shun such publicity. He had no desire for the limelight. Far rather would he pass his life and end his days as a recluse, far from the haunts and taunts of men, than amid the madding crowd with whom he held so little in common and so much in dread. How could he be sure that rebellious citizens might not some day declare: "We will not have this man, this murderer's son, to reign over us!" In a word, he was not man enough for the task that his father designed to put upon him.

Under a Cloud.

In this Enoch we may find a type of those persons—youthful or adult—who through no fault of their own live under some cloud of heredity or circumstance.

Some inherit from their parents a propensity for drink, or for thieving, or for gross and evil

passions. Others are predisposed to indolence, to hasty temper, to gloom and solitude, to nervousness or craven fear ; are unreliable in emergency, weak in the moment of temptation, despondent in the hour of trial. Like ninepins they go down before the first straight ball of test. Self-centred, they are always sorry for themselves, seldom considerate of others. And the pity of it is that primarily the responsibility is not their own. At rock-bottom they are not to blame.

Apart from heredity, many are victims of *circumstances over which they have no control*. Some are reared thus ; to others the sorrow comes in later years. Think of the little children born in slums, their eyes and ears trained to obscenity, their lips to profanity, and their hands to violence. Think of the once well-to-do, who in middle life or older age have fallen foul of Fortune, with the foundations of prosperity shaken, and the edifice of comfort falling about their ears. Enochs of this type may be found galore, and by no means all of the male sex.

Others there are who have, at the instance of well-meaning but undiscerning persons—parents, maybe—been pitchforked into *positions*

for which they had no aptitude. They knew they could not "fill the bill" or rise to the occasion as expected. Such ability as they possessed, such choice as was denied them, lay in other directions. As square pegs in round holes which they could not fit, they failed inevitably, and were then reproached for not availing themselves of so splendid an opportunity!

Our Attitude.

What should be our attitude to all such? Surely one of sympathy, not contempt. It is so easy to criticise, so congenial to condemn! But what if we stood in their sorry shoes, their pitiable plight? "Who art thou that judgest another?" asks the Apostle James, with far-seeing indignation. So Paul, and again in trenchant terms: "Who maketh thee to differ from another? What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou boast as if thou hadst not received it?" "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such an one, *considering thyself lest thou also*," be put to the test. In the words of Peter: "Be pitiful, be courteous."

Enoch, Cain's son! There are titles bad

enough and heritages hard enough to bear, without having their results rubbed in with pitiless criticism or contempt. And if boy or man shrinks from the publicity of his father's sin; or fails in the responsibility of a scheme of someone else's planning that has been foisted upon him against his will; or is otherwise subjected to conditions that he never sought—is he to be a pariah on that account? There are failures *and* failures. Some may fail of successful achievement. Do not let us fail of a generous charity!

“For the world is full of sighs,
Full of sad and weeping eyes—
HELP YOUR FALLEN BROTHER RISE,
While the days are going by!”

ENOCH THE SECOND

Here is one of a very different type. In a recent volume on Bible heroes, I find him included among “Lesser known characters”! Such inclusion is significant; for it is unhappily true that his type of saintliness is all too rare a plant in the garden of current Christianity. For piety does not always lead to prominence. When it does, it is sometimes at the cross of ridicule or even at the martyr's stake. Never-

theless it were well for all of us if in our own experience we more intimately knew this Enoch and the type of religion for which he stood.

A Place in the Sun.

Like Abel, he also found a place in the sun, and dwelt in it. The first Enoch lived in the depths, walking and talking with himself; this one lived on the heights, he "walked with God" (Gen. v. 21-24), and held converse with the Most High. His was a sunny soul, bright with the light of heaven, which shone out in his life and dispensed gladness all around.

One winter day I sat on the balcony of a Swiss hotel far up in the mountains. Around and above me towered lofty peaks, clad with eternal snow, gleaming in the sunlight. Far below lay the valley, hemmed in on either side by a range of hills, the space between being roofed across by deep banks of cloud, spread out like a vast fluffy blanket, through which the sunlight could not pierce. The dwellers in the valley had no sunshine to warm and cheer them, but those on the mountain enjoyed it to the full. That was just the difference between the two Enochs. The second of that ilk lived a life that was as brilliant as the sun at noon, and

made other hearts rejoice with the glow of his own. And yet he was a religious man! Some religious people are more of the blanket than the sunbeam type. Our sympathy is with the little child who prayed the Lord to "make the bad people good, and the good people nice"! True, some good folk are dull and crotchety. But many who are not good are worse. Satan owns no freehold in the sun, he holds no monopoly of life's brightness. Goodness is not a synonym for gloom, though he would often have us think it is. For all time, Enoch stands as a living example of how to be happy though pious.

We are apt to suppose it was so much easier to live the saintly life in those far-off days than now. But was it? The more closely we study these men of old, the less that impression will grow upon us. Patriarch and prophet had deeper intensity of hate to face than falls to the common lot. Our hindrances were theirs, and worse. Their fellow-men were just as resentful towards goodness as any we have known, and the holy hill was just as steep to climb. Collate the facts revealed of Enoch's daily round, and take heart therefrom. He was no bread-and-water ascetic or monk of the hair-

shirt. He mixed freely with other folk, shared the amenities of life, shouldered its responsibilities, and bravely faced the jeers of those who mockingly called him "saint"! And in it all "he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. xi. 5).

IN THE HOME.—He "begat sons and daughters." There is no reason to suppose he had less than the average, and births were prolific in those centuries. One of his sons was Methuselah, an easy first in the record of a human tale of years, who topped the score at 969. Enoch lived about one-third as long, but long enough to know all about the ways and worries of family life; the costs of clothing and educating his boys and girls, and providing them a start in life when sweethearts came along. As a young father, many hours of sleep had he given up to the soothing of the restive babe; and as his offspring grew in numbers and in needs, his paternal hands had all their work cut out to do their part. Nor would frequent prayer for his children be neglected by the man who "walked with God," and his great-grandson, Noah, followed in the godly line. Whatever family life may have brought to Enoch, of work or worry, of joys or

sorrows, of pleasure or pain, he found wide scope therein for pleasing God.

IN THE PUBLIC EYE.—As “the seventh from Adam” (Jude 14), he inherited the chief place of the family clan in his own generation. This involved the wide responsibilities of priest, of ruler, and of judge. He was Archbishop, Prime Minister, and Lord Chancellor combined. Thus he lived in the glare of a fierce publicity. Countless were the calls upon his time, his temper, and his tact. Very few known precedents had he to guide him in the administration of the law; hence the need for cool, wise judgment. His personal integrity was a great asset. Whatever his verdict, the delinquent knew it was a true man before whom he stood. And as a priest, none dared say that he failed to practise what he preached. The record of his public life was clean. His religious principles were his stand-by. In his official as in his private capacity, “he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

AMONG HIS NEIGHBOURS.—But to please God is not always to please men; and there were many who would delight to find a weak spot in Enoch's holy character. Jude, in his brief Epistle, hints that this good man knew more

than a little of the ways of "ungodly men," with their "ungodly deeds," and the "hard speeches" with which they sought to embitter the sweetness of his soul. The mole can never understand the eagle, and Enoch was too unworldly for the carnal mind. In all essentials the human heart was then the same as now, and Enoch's life of rose-leaves was not immune from thorns. Yet he trod serenely, for he "walked with God."

The fact is, nothing less than a God-encompassed heart is ever equal to the varied emergencies of life. Nothing short of *Divine grace*, liberally bestowed, can qualify any man to meet such diverse claims. But it "is sufficient," and "for thee" (2 Cor. xii. 9). The Lord who promises is the Lord who proves, and never does He fail to perform His word. So astute a man of the world as King Solomon recognised that there are some evils that are "common among men" (Eccles. vi. 1); and one so deeply versed in the affairs of the other world as Paul declared: "There hath no temptation (or testing) taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tested above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also

make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). It is gloriously possible, under all circumstances, however hard they be, for every child of God to "have this testimony, that he pleased God."

When Work is Done.

Such men are missed when they are gone. One day people were asking each other: "What has become of Enoch? Have you seen him to-day?" And nobody had. "He was not found, for God had taken him." Then they realised their loss. Post-mortem compliments began to fly about; regrets were in the air. Perchance some men who had placed thorns in his path were sorry they could place no roses on his bier. Many would gladly have afforded him a public funeral to extol his virtues. With Moses, Enoch shared the unique honour of the world's simplest funeral, which fitly closed his career on earth. For his was essentially the simple life, simple in its beauty, its fidelity, and its faith. He knew no subtleties, no compromise; but he knew God, and simply walked with Him. Enoch had no plans apart from His Partner; their counsels were at one, their ideals identical. Other-worldly, was he? Yes,

yet none more *practical* than he! Three hundred and sixty-five years he lived on earth. Three hundred and sixty-five days in every year he walked with God, ever in the sunny upper air, until he was "translated" to the eternal glory. And when he passed to the other side, strong men were not ashamed to weep. They may at times have envied him, belittled him, maligned him; yet many would have gladly had him back again. His was no mean achievement whose consistent character in public and private life won "this testimony, that he pleased God." Compared with that, nothing else mattered.

CHAPTER IV

NOAH

OBEDIENCE AND JUDGMENT

HERE was another hero who "walked with God" (Gen. vi. 9). It is a tribute to the lasting influence of Enoch's piety that his grandson followed in the good old way. Young people are apt to regard grandfathers as harmless old fogeys who are too much out-of-date for their example to be worthy of imitation; back numbers, of interest in their own day, but turned over and put away in favour of later issues.

To walk with God was no easier for Noah than for his predecessor. All around him "the wickedness of man was great" (vi. 5), praising all that was evil, scoffing at all that was good. His brow was often furrowed, and his heart ached until it was sore, at the sin and sorrow that he could neither prevent nor cure. There was a storm brewing that he was powerless to avert. The clouds of evil were storing

up a torrent of judgment ; and as he interpreted the signs in the heavens, he was "moved with fear" (Heb. xi. 7).

"God Commanded."

Like a puzzled student, Noah had an intricate problem to solve and a tremendous task to undertake. The only solution lay in obedience to the Divine command. But that was to cost him dear. Ridicule, reproach, and scorn ; argument, impatience, pity—friends joined with foes to turn him from his purpose. It needs no great imagination to depict the state of things.

The *thoughtless* would have their fling. Who ever heard of building a great ship miles away from any water ? Was ever such a crazy notion ! Poor old Noah—gone clean off his head ! And boisterous mirth would accompany their shallow jests about a madman's dream. But "all that God commanded him, so did he."

The *clever* would have their say. Experienced engineers would declare that the ark was built upon wrong principles, and could not be safely steered. Dilettante artists would pour contempt upon its ugliness, a hideous black blot upon either land or water. And

jolly, bluff sailors, summoned from far, would bluntly deliver their verdict: If the great vessel were near the sea—which it was not—they would refuse to navigate so unwieldy a barque; they had too much respect for the dignity of their calling, and too much regard for wives and families, to sign on for a voyage in this preposterous ark. Yet still Noah built on.

The *practical* would take him to task. An influential deputation of business men, respectable and bland, elects to wait upon him, with just a few words about this hopeless scheme. They disclaim any alliance with the stupid fun-makers who simply ridicule it and call it names. They are assured of his good intentions and his perfect sincerity. But really he is entirely mistaken. They have gone into the matter very carefully, taking measurements and estimating costs; and he is simply wasting time and money that could be put to better use. Let it be spent on improved houses and public parks—there were contractors among them who were quite willing to tender for such work! Here was the way to improve the morals of the people and to remedy the evils they all so much deplored. Noah listened politely, and continued building.

The *angry* let him know what they thought of him, with fierce looks to indicate they would stand no nonsense. This ark-building had got to stop, and if he didn't stop it, they would! They knew what lay behind it all—an implied reflection upon themselves. They would live as they liked, and would brook no interference. So now he knew. But Noah still built, in spite of threats.

And the *self-interested* put in their plea. Even his nearest and dearest may have had doubts at times as to his mental condition. In any case, was he not carrying his courageous convictions too far, for his own safety and for theirs? Could he not see also how awkward his action made the position of his sons and their wives among their friends? Social amenities had to be considered, and to be cut by former intimates, was most unpleasant. Much as they loved him, they would be glad if he could moderate his earnestness and be more genial in his bearing to his friends and neighbours. But the ark went on growing.

For Noah was not his own master. God had commanded, and the servant dared not disobey. Not that he wished to. Knowing

all that had been revealed to him, he knew well that he was right. Men might call him stubborn, pig-headed, a monomaniac, and other opprobrious names; but he who walks with God is assured of his road and of his destination. To him only one thing matters, and that is, to do his Master's will.

Yet Noah did not spend all his time in building. He knew the ark was an emblem of judgment; but he also knew that "the long-suffering of God" still "waited" to see if men would repent of their sin, during the long years "while the ark was a-preparing" (1 Pet. iii. 20), that so disaster might be averted. We are told three good things about him:—

HE PREACHED.—"A preacher of righteousness," he is called (2 Pet. ii. 5). It was as if he hung up two pictures as an object-lesson for all to see—the one showing in beautiful colours the pure and holy righteousness of God; the other revealing the black sinfulness of men. Then he would point to the contrast between the two, and tell his hearers that if they would repent of their sin and turn to God, He would forgive them; but that if they would not, a terrible destruction would overwhelm them. Noah had no difficulty in gathering a con-

gregation, for there were plenty of people who came every day to see how the ark was getting on. Some were thoughtful, some were flippant, others hostile; but they *all heard the truth* as it was faithfully proclaimed to them. None could ever plead ignorance, or urge that they were never warned.

HE PRAYED.—We learn this from Ezekiel (xiv. 14, 20), who classes him with Job and Daniel as a man of prayer. Job prayed for his children every day (Job i. 5); and Daniel prayed so often, that his enemies appealed to the lions to shut him up (Dan. vi. 7). Evidently Noah prayed constantly for the sinners all around him, as Abraham later prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. xviii. 23-33); for he had a tender heart as well as a righteous soul. It was not his persistency in building the ark, but men's obstinacy in refusing his warning that caused the Flood to come, though he spared nothing of labour, prayer, and preaching, to turn them from their evil ways.

HE LIVED CONSISTENTLY.—Ezekiel, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews (xi. 7) all speak of Noah's "righteousness"; and how could he live other than rightly when he "walked with God"? And, like Enoch, he did this "by

faith"—he believed that what God said was true, and acted accordingly. None of those who lived before the Flood could ever say he preached what he did not practise, or bade them believe what he did not believe himself. His daily life agreed with all that he professed; and in his obedience, his earnestness, his courage and his sincerity, he is an example to us all.

"God Remembered."

In spite of all the ridicule and opposition to which Noah had been exposed while he built the ark, and the doubts that were freely expressed as to whether there would ever be a Flood at all—of which the passing years gave no sign—yet come it did, for God had said it would, and Noah was proved to be right after all. In chap. vii. we are told on which day it began, and how long it lasted; and in chap. viii. when it came to an end. Then "God remembered Noah" (viii. 1).

He remembered his OBEEDIENCE.⁵—He did not forget it on a single day in all those years of building. And yet all the time that Noah was obeying, he was having a very hard time, for obedience brought with it many trials. To obey gladly is not always an easy thing, is it?

It often seems to take away more than it gives, and some of us get tired of it much sooner than we ought. But if we remember God, He will remember us, and in the long run obedience always brings its own reward, if we have the patience to bide His time.

He remembered Noah's SAFETY.——Just before the Flood began, God said: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark"; and then "the Lord shut him in" (vii. 1, 16). Noah must have heard many a door slam in the six hundred years he had already lived, but there was never a slam before or since that meant so much as that one did. It made all the difference between the saints inside and the sinners outside, between safety and destruction, life and death. Surely Noah felt sad at heart that not a single person to whom he had preached so faithfully and earnestly had taken his advice or heeded his warnings; for not one of them went with him into the ark. Perhaps some had ridiculed him to the very last, and mockingly wished him "good luck and a safe voyage on dry land"; for still they did not believe the Flood would ever come. Jesus tells us how "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the Flood came," and with

awful suddenness "took them all away" (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39).

But Noah was safe because he obeyed, not only in building the ark, but in *entering* it. If, after all his patient toil, he had disbelieved and disobeyed when God said, "Come into the ark," he himself would have been swept away by the swirling waters. But he had "walked with God" so long, and knew Him so well, that when he heard that word, "Come," he knew that God Himself had entered first, and so he gladly followed. For where God is, His children are always safe.

And God remembered Noah's DELIVERANCE.—Safe as he was from the Flood, he would not want to spend the rest of his life in the ark, nor did God intend him to. Day by day for five months he had peered out of the only window, watching the rain; until one morning he found it had stopped, and the ark was resting on Mount Ararat. Six weeks later, he sent out, first a raven, then a dove; and when the latter returned, after its second flight, with an olive-leaf in its beak, how joyful Noah and his family must have been! How carefully they would examine that tiny token, as if they had never seen one before! Outwardly it

looked like any other olive-leaf; but to them it was a wonder of wonders, for it was the assurance of God's faithfulness in their coming deliverance. Had we been they, we should have locked it up in a jewel-box, as a keepsake more precious than any treasure we possessed.

In due time God, who had shut the door, opened it and let them out. For some time it was a very lonely and dreary world that lay before them, and the scenes that daily met their eyes must have filled them with terrible pain of heart and mind; yet with what deep thanksgiving for their wonderful escape and deliverance! So the first thing Noah did was to build "an altar unto the Lord" (viii. 20), to dedicate himself and his family afresh to Him. Thus *Noah remembered God*.

Does all this seem an old story and nothing more, and with no message for us to-day? But it was then that the first rainbow appeared, with its pledge that God would never bring another Flood upon the earth (ix. 12-16). And further, whenever *He* looked upon it, He would remember "the everlasting covenant" that He had made with His faithful servant. Thus "God remembered" Noah's past, his present, and his future; and gave this "token"

that in love He would never forget. He took the whole of Noah's life, at every stage of it, into His loving care and keeping, and He wants to do the same with ours. If we give Him our obedience, He will preserve our going out and our coming in, and He will preserve our soul (Ps. cxxi. 7, 8).

A Word to the Young.

The ark has another message, especially for the young. It tells us that while restrictions have their uses, they do not last for ever. Do you sometimes envy older people who have more liberty than you? Well, you are in THE ARK OF CHILDHOOD, and are "shut in" to lessons and rules, and other things that seem so dull, that you are sometimes bored to tears. You are also shut in by your age and size and strength from doing what men and women are able to perform. But time will alter all this; and by-and-by you will leave your lessons behind, and will be old and strong enough to "go forth" to do greater and more important things. So be patient, as Noah was, and the time of new opportunities will come, when God will say to you: "Behold, I set before you an open door" (Rev. iii. 8); and

that will lead you into "a large room," or place (Ps. xxxi. 8). But this is not that you may merely enjoy life in pleasing yourself, for that "large place" is one in which you can help others, as Jesus did when He was upon earth.

There was once a celebrated musician to whom a man went for lessons in playing the violin. The pupil became very impatient because his progress was so slow. Sometimes he would blame the instrument ; at other times, the music he was set to play ; and one day he got into a temper and declared it was all his teacher's fault. The musician smiled, and said quietly : " Would you like to know where the fault really lies ? " " Yes," said the man, sulkily. " Well, it is here," replied the teacher ; "*you did not begin young enough* ; your fingers have grown too stiff, and your sight and hearing are not so keen as they used to be. Therefore, though you may learn to play, you will never play well."

In pleasing God and being helpful to other people, you cannot begin too early. " Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth (Eccles. xii. 1) ; and then " in all thy ^{mer} acknowledge Him, and He shall direct ^{ing of} hope, paths " (Prov. iii. 6). I feel sure ^{ries,} test

began young ; and as he remembered God and obeyed Him, so "God remembered Noah" and "blessed" him.

Noah was a true hero. For obedience is often heroic, and none but the spiritually brave can fight the Lord's battles. Then comes victory, and with the victory a song.

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and he began to act upon it, the
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ABRAHAM

THE FRIEND OF GOD

WAS Abram a man or a myth, an individual or an ideal? It is extraordinary how far round some folk will travel rather than follow a straight path, at least where Biblical statements are concerned. As well might one prefer to climb a hundred stairs at a Tube station instead of to use the lift. Men lose themselves in tangled scrubs of doubt when they leave the King's Highway. Some have insisted that Abram was not a person, but an "ideal nation" personified; others, that he (if a man) thought was the voice of the home merely "the expression of his own far-distant consciousness." Such remedies are woe-bidding the disease—if disease there be, other hope to that of wilful unbelief. In other words, difficulties of scepticism are greater than another hope, it essays to solve.

In the case of Abram, a simple test of
tries,

began young ; and as he remembered God as one obeyed Him, so "God remembered, and there and "blessed" him. (Gen. xii. 10-

Noah—real true heroism that he heard the often heard God's promise and command—can a can his "inner consciousness" fulfil its own prediction that he shall have a son at a hundred years of age and descendants as numerous as the stars (xv. 5, 6)? These are but two examples among a score that may be given. It is idle to waste time and thought with such futilities.

Accepting the record as we find it, Abram was a man, and a remarkable one at that. There is much we should have liked to know at his youthful days. It is not very exact to read merely that his father's name Terah ; that he had two brothers, of whom (Lot's father) died at Ur of the Chaldees where they were born. He strides forth, a majestic figure, out of the haze of the already advanced age of five. From Josh. xxiv. 2, we learn that he was born and bred in idolatry ; and that after he was dead, "images" were still worshipped in at least one branch of the family before him (Gen. xxxi. 19).

But when once the higher revelation had come to him and he began to act upon it, the novelty of excitement would not be lacking in his quiet, pastoral life ; for he would meet with the opposition of local unbelievers, as Noah and Enoch did ; and would never know in the morning what experiences might be his ere night should fall. Thus he was kept ever on the *qui vive*, alert and watchful, witnessing for God.

The Start from Ur.

He had been long married, though childless, when his father decided to quit the old home at Ur, and to start life afresh in a foreign land. It was a startling venture for Terah, well on in his second century and with one foot in the grave. Whether or not he, like Abram, had turned from his idols, it must have been no small wrench to break away from the home of his ancestors, and emigrate to far-distant Canaan. A painful ordeal, too, this bidding of a last farewell to his remaining son, Nahor, and his family, whom he could never hope to see on earth again. But with his wife and another son already laid to rest—and, we may hope, his love of idolatry dead also—the severing of former ties, with their grief-laden memories,

induced him to undertake the long and tedious journey. Accompanying him were Abram and his wife Sarai, Lot the grandson, a sufficient convoy of servants, camel-drivers, tents, and food, and all the varied equipment of the caravanserai.

It is clear from Stephen's historical survey (Acts vii.) that it was to Abram, not to Terah, that the Divine command for removal came (*cf.* Gen. xii. 1). Therefore, whatever the others may have thought or felt, one at least of that family party was convinced that he was acting in obedience to the will of God. Many and severe testings might be in store in the future days and years; yet Abram's heart was light, and his soul was filled with the joy that obedience brings. Enough that God had said: "I will show . . . I will make . . . I will bless . . ." (xii. 1-12); and "by faith" His confiding child was sustained until those promises came one by one to be fulfilled (Heb. xi. 8).

Abram knew God well enough to trust Him.
—And this with no one's experience but his own to support his trust. No "Lives of the Saints" had he, to peruse for his encouragement; no "Records of God's Dealings" with

other believers who had put Him to the test and never found Him fail. We are not sure that he had ever heard of Noah and Enoch. None were within his reach with whom he could compare notes to confirm his faith. Yet how he trusted his Lord—and this because he knew Him! “Abraham, My friend,” was the tender way in which God spoke of him (Isa. xli. 8); to which striking fact, St. James, two thousand years later, referred when he wrote to encourage the Christians of the Early Church: “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God” (Jas. ii. 23). So at the Divine command, “he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. xi. 8), assured that God would see him through.

What advantages are ours that this loyal patriarch never had! Have you, my reader, been reared in a Christian home, in which the idol-altar never stood? No heathen ancestry cast its shadow upon your early life. No unholy customs inherited from the past held you bound to the worship of an alien god. “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures”—have they made you “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. iii. 15)? History and experience, our

godly friends, and the life-stories of others whom we have not known, all unite in joyful witness that God has never been known to break His word or leave a promise unfulfilled. The glad melody of ten thousand hearts is echoed in our ears :—

They who trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true.

God knew Abram well enough to trust him.
—That is another reassuring fact. Of all the townsfolk of Ur, of all the members of Terah's family—sons and husbands, wives and children—Abram was the only one whom God selected as His partner to bring about the far-reaching purposes He had in view. And the more He knew of him, the better He trusted him. And why? Because Abram was always ready to *listen and obey*.

Thus by degrees God took him more and more into His confidence, with an intimacy in which He could say later: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him"—as one trustworthy alike in his family concerns and those of wider import (xviii. 17-19). As he obeyed, so he was proved, and so gained further knowledge of the Divine ways.

God and Abram grew to love one another.
—That was the secret of all the rest. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? For mutual trust breeds mutual love. Each the other's friend—has any more beautiful picture ever been conceived than this close intimacy between God and a man?

For ourselves, the uniting link has been forged in the Beloved Son, whose meat it was to do His Father's will—even unto suffering and death—for the redemption of those who through disobedience had become alienated from the Divine Love. Let our fervent prayer be this, in the simplicity of the child-heart of former days, as we ponder that Infinite Grace:—

Great God! And wilt Thou condescend
To be my Father and my Friend?
I a poor child and Thou so high,
The Lord of earth and air and sky!

Art Thou my Father? Let me be
A meek, obedient child to Thee;
And try in word and deed and thought
To serve and please Thee as I ought!

CHAPTER VI

ABRAHAM

WHEN THE TIDE WAS OUT

IT is instructive to note that Abram's deviations from his highest ideals were due to his family ties! First it was his father, then his wife, and most of all his nephew, Lot, through whom he was retarded or misdirected. "They came to Haran, and dwelt there" (Gen. xi. 31). But that was not the original intention. "They went forth from there to go into the land of Canaan," and Haran was a long way short of that.

The Delay at Haran.

Old man Terah was very tired. The weight of two-hundred-and-five years lay heavy upon him. He had had enough of travelling. The journey had proved even more arduous than he had feared. It was too great a tax upon his failing strength. If they proceeded further, the work was yet to come, for between Haran

and Canaan lay a long and dreary desert waste. Small wonder, then, that, whether from weakness or wilfulness, he querulously pleaded—or peremptorily insisted—that not a step further could he go; they might take that as final!

Probably Lot had his say also. Haran was a very nice place, and the best was always good enough for *him*! What did they really know about Canaan anyway? It might be all right or it might not. Why fag across the desert? Why risk the losing of what they had, at the hands of marauding Bedouins? He was not looking for trouble if he could help it. He thought Grandad was right. Let them stop where they were!

For Lot's eye was ever keen for profit as well as for pleasure. He was out for business, and to his mind here were good openings for a young man. Haran was a commercial centre, and just suited to his worldly instinct. They had sacrificed quite enough, he thought, by leaving town, and digging up their heritage by the roots. Here they had a chance, not only to recoup their loss, but to increase their gain. So, with two to one against him, Abram had no option but to stay. Not that he would have done so merely to satisfy his ~~would~~ all

ambition. It was his father he had to consider first. Then "*Terah died.*"

It is often so. Have we, like Abram, conceived our plans and projects—born, it may be, of deep spiritual longing or conviction—whose fulfilment has been hindered long by conditions outside our own control? There have been persons to be considered, duties to be performed, and these have demanded first attention. The years have slipped away, leaving little behind but disappointment; as a receding tide reveals the bareness of the beach, with perhaps a cheerless waste of mud and slime, or at best a fruitless expanse of sand and rock, with here and there an ineffective pool. But later the tide returns. We hear the soft-voiced whispers of tiny wavelets as they break. Terah is no more. Our hindrance is removed. The vessel is in the bay. The sea is calling. *Are we then ready to respond?*

There have been LEGITIMATE REASONS FOR DELAY.—The gracious Lord, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, has seen and sympathised. It has not been wrong to wait. The circumstances were exceptional. And what of the meantime, if, with any, the release the world needs yet? Is there nothing in our

so-called ineffective pools? Have we not, as children, delighted in those rocky holes? Sea-anemones were there to excite our curiosity; multi-coloured sea-plants, of slender tracery, that we had not found elsewhere; baby-crabs and weeny shells; tiny fish that eluded our anxious grasp. Are there no joys to be found in the pools of life, *even when the tide is out?*

But they must be sought and searched for. They do not lie in the open. Perhaps that is why we have missed them and have only seen the sand. But if found, they will cheer the interim until the tide of opportunity returns.

There are REASONS THAT ARE NOT LEGITIMATE.—Let us not confuse exception with excuse. What is our *motive* for delay? Is it the fear of risk or hardship, the desire for worldly gain, a preference for charming though godless society? Such reasons may influence Lot, but they must not weigh with Abram. The man of fashion will always vote for Haran, the half-way halting-place. The man of faith is anxious to press on to the Canaan of his best desire.

Nor did Abram lose by waiting—with clear conscience—until his father's death; for filial duty has its obligations. He would all

remain idle, however, even in Haran, where apparently he stayed some years. And the Lord prospered him, so that it was with a larger and richer caravanserai of "substance gathered" there that he pursued his journey after Terah died.

Are we to suppose that he had hidden his convictions from others during that long interval? Nay, surely he would bear his witness to the Haran folk! Many had inquired why he came there, why he tarried, when he would move on; and emphatically why on earth he wanted to go to Canaan at all! Would he hide his light under a bushel, or keep silence with such an opportunity to testify for God? We can much more readily believe that Lot must have squirmed, times and again, at his uncle's faithfulness in declaring his beliefs; at his uncompromising refusal to adapt himself to Haran's ways. By lip and life Abram would honour his Lord, would maintain his holy standard, winning respect even in circles where he was disapproved; and I fancy there were some who were sorry when the old man went away. Childless himself, he would often lay a tender hand upon the head of a little the orphan child. With his kindly disposition, his

stately bearing, his patriarchal mien, he was one of the old aristocracy at its best ; always ready as helper, counsellor, and friend. He had searched the pools, and who can estimate his joyful discoveries therein ?

On to Canaan.

“ So Abram departed, as the Lord had said unto him ” (xii. 4). Once more he followed the beckoning Hand, as he and his family party “ went forth to go into the land of Canaan ” ; and this time, “ into the land of Canaan *they came* ” (xii. 5). He had not arrived there long before “ the Lord appeared unto Abram ” with renewed promise ; and successive stages of his Pilgrim’s Progress were marked by memorial altars, at Sichem and elsewhere, to meet God’s pledge with his own in devotion, thanksgiving, and consecration.

I recall a lady who, before her marriage, gave a good deal of time to Christian work ; but later, this succumbed to her many domestic duties. A devoted mother, she made her children her first care ; and it was only natural that, while they were still young, her time should be largely given to them. But she had for so long got into the habit of declining all

Christian service outside the home, that when the young people were almost grown up and not needing so much attention, it came almost as a shock to her to realise that she was still *inexcusably using the old excuse*. Realising that fact, she once more threw herself heartily into work for the Lord and for others.

King Solomon wrote: "To everything there is a season and a time . . . a time to keep silence and a time to speak" (Eccles. iii. 1-7). Under certain circumstances children are told they "should be seen and not heard," but their parents would be very sorry if they had to remain *always* dumb. We might add more, and say with Solomon: "There is a time to sleep and a time to wake; a time to work and a time to rest," and so on; all of which means that we are not to go on doing one thing when the demands of life call for something else. Each is only right at its proper time. When Abram reached Canaan, he did not stop on the border, but "passed through the land" (ver. 6) until he was well into it. Thus, as each day brought its *fresh scenes and experiences*, he was able more and more to see what a rich and wondrous gift it was that he was receiving at God's hand.

And all because he had taken Him at His word.

Does this seem to be a counsel of perfection, beyond the reach of average people like ourselves? Listen to the testimony of a bed-ridden, crippled girl for whom the common joys of life were *nil*:—

I see God's sun behind earth's clouds,
Heav'n's blue beyond earth's grey;
The gleaming of the jasper walls
Across earth's dusty way . . .
I see my Father's smile of love
Light up earth's dreariest frowns;
Fair stars for Heaven's diadems
Shine round earth's thorniest crowns . . .
I see, like sunshine everywhere,
God's goodness, mercy, grace.
And for the rest, I trust His love
Until I see His face.

That is the Divine intention for all who, in the course of Providence, meet with disappointment. It is also our Father's compensation to all who search the pools—when the tide is out.

CHAPTER VII

ABRAHAM

THE FRIEND OF MAN

ALL was going well with Abram. Then the devil, who hates to see people happy, interfered. A shadow darkened the fair landscape. "There was a famine in the land" (xii. 10). One morning, Sarai remarks anxiously to her husband: "We are getting very short of flour, Abram! There is only enough for a few days." For "Rationing" became known, even in those far-off times. Terah was dead, but Lot was very much alive. "The cattle are badly needing corn, Uncle," I think I hear him say. "I've been scouring round to get some, but there is none to be had for love or money!" He liked his three full meals a day, did Lot, and had no use for "Food Economy." More than likely, the proposal was his to go "down into Egypt to sojourn there," and that he talked his uncle into it. Maybe he had also thought

out a plan of bringing a store back to Canaan to sell at high prices to the inhabitants of the land; at any rate, he had all the covetous instinct of the profiteer.

A Spiritual Setback.

And Abram weakly yielded, as the best of us are apt to do, under the stress of a temporary disillusionment. It was a spiritual setback. Had he considered well, he would have foreseen there was neither promise nor altar down in Egypt; no settled conviction or guarantee, no rest of faith, no peace of heart. It was a policy of expediency. He could trust God in the wholesale, but not in the retail; in principle, but not in detail; for vast possessions, but not for a penny loaf. As if the Lord were not *God of the small things*, as well as of the great! There is always "a time" to trust, but never to doubt, where our Heavenly Father is concerned. He is equal to all emergencies.

It was not only Abram's food, but his faith, that failed. Surely he might have known that God had not brought him all this way, from Ur to Haran, and Haran to Canaan, to let him starve and die! On the contrary, it was a

great opportunity for his faith to triumph, by trusting Him to supply his need. Was he grown so rich that he had become too self-reliant? Was he beginning to trust too much in his wealth? If so, God must teach him the lesson of *dependence upon Him*, even for his daily bread; to seek *His* counsel, and not to be swayed by the worldly advice of Lot or any other man.

Imagine Lot, if you can, in the *rôle* of an art-critic; passing his judgment on the fair scene of the Divine purpose, pointing out its disproportion and faulty perspective, and all spoiled by the spectre of famine stalking across the landscape. So he was ready with paint and brush to improve the picture with deft touches of Egyptian colour. But, alas, the paint suddenly turned to tar, and the scene was ruined with a black daub. And as, in shame and humiliation, Abram later reviewed the sin of his own falsehood, Lot would be quite ready with his excuses: "Ah, but it wasn't my fault, Uncle! You laid it on too thick; I never supposed you would make such a horrible mess of the scene as that!"

Such is always the result when Christian principle yields to worldly leading. There is

only one remedy—back to Bethel—"unto the place of the altar" as "at the first" (xiii. 4), where only the Spirit of Love and the Divine oil of Grace can remove the stain. It was a sad memorial that Abram erected there in Egypt. For "Egypt," and the bondage it stands for in spiritual experience, is always fatal to the progress of the child of God who goes "down" thither for its help. What a humiliation, to be dismissed for lying, and by a heathen king! Yet we need never be surprised if the snare of the worldly results in the sneer of the ungodly!

Forgiveness secured, prosperity followed; and Abram became "very rich, in cattle, in silver, and in gold." "Lot also had flocks, and herds, and tents." Yet wealth was not happiness. Their herdmen quarrelled, the masters must part, for the place was not big enough that could hold them both (chap. xiii.).

The Worldly Christian.

Lot's selfish choice has become a proverb, upon which we need not dwell, save to note how ill his rosy fancies accorded with the grim resultant facts. As he "pitched his tent towards Sodom," he may have regarded the

prospect as top-hole; but before he knew it he was bunkered—stripped of his possessions and taken prisoner by an invading army, in the battle of “four kings with five” (chap. xiv.). That was the limit! Then he called for Uncle. If Uncle were only here! Let us hope he also felt some compunction for his previous ingratitude. So Abram, faithful as ever to the transgressor, no sooner heard of the disaster than he came with an armed force and rescued him. Not that Lot really profited by his experience—as the still greater disaster of Sodom proved, in which he ultimately became a fugitive, homeless, dishonoured, and disgraced.

Thanks to this timely aid, the foe had been routed; and now the King of Sodom, impatient of the delay caused by Melchizedek's religious ceremony,* interposed with a business proposition, claiming Abram as his partner in success.

“Give me the persons,” said he—that is, the women and slaves who, together with Lot, had been captured by the enemy and rescued by Abram—“and take the goods to thyself.”

But the patriarch who had come under the spell of a saintly soul like Melchizedek's would have no truck with Sodom's king.

* See p. 92.

"I wouldn't receive as much as a bootlace from such as you," was his scathing rejoinder, "lest you should boast that *you* had made me rich!"

Well would it be if the Christian Church had always stood for such a sterling principle! Then we should not hear of stained windows paid for with tainted money; of churches built, and Christian work supported, by gifts to salve some donors' guilty consciences. There would be no raffles or whist-drives or penny-gaff shows to raise funds for church expenses; nor the impressing of local tradesmen to send goods to the bazaar, to which blackmail they have to yield lest they lose custom by refusal. Such things ought not to be done in the name of God's religion. But they have been, and they are.

Of course, the King of Sodom returned home jubilant with so lucrative a bargain! "If Abram likes to be such a fool, that's his affair—I'm all right!" Such might well be his chuckling comment as he jaunted back to town. But Abram had done the right thing, the square thing, the *clean* thing; and when, years later, he saw the smoke of the doomed city rising from its dishonoured ashes, I think I hear him say: "Thank God, I washed my hands of the King

of Sodom once for all, and never put myself under obligation to such a man as that!" For he who yields to the world becomes the slave of the world. But he who avoids the tar-pot bears no stain of the tar.

And further—if all church-members everywhere followed Abram's example and gave a tenth of their income to the Lord's work, none of these unholy subterfuges and contemptible dodges would be even thought of; for there would be an abundance of funds for all legitimate and spiritual purposes. Thus would be removed a serious blot upon the Church's methods and the world's reproach upon the Christian name.

But what of Abram's renunciation? On two notable occasions God reappeared to strengthen him. First, "after Lot had separated from him," He bade him: "Lift up now thine eyes and look. Arise, walk through the land"—Lot's included—"in the length of it and the breadth of it; to thee will I give it" (chap. xiii.). And later: "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (chap. xv.). And he believed . . . and it was counted to him for righteousness. We hear no more of his great riches; but we find him spoken of by Apostle

and Prophet as "the father of the faithful" and "the friend of God." And what can a believer wish for more?

Yet, with all his piety, Abram was very practical, for religion does not make a man a ninny. He was a friend to man as well as of God. He had stood by Terah to the last, laying much upon the altar of his fidelity. He did Lot an excellent turn when he rescued him from his captors, and would have saved him from the mire of Sodom if his money-ridden nephew would have let him. Finally, when the dark cloud of judgment was impending over Sodom and Gomorrah, it was Abram, the friend of God, whose voice was heard in pleading, as the friend of man.

And what a wondrous pleading that was! The Lord had taken him into His confidence, and Abram had taken Him at His word. In the closest intimacy of communion, with promise succeeding promise if only His servant would walk before Him in the perfect way (xvii. 1-8); and having tested the loyalty of his inmost soul, God decided that He could no longer hide from him His reluctant purpose regarding the cities of the plain (xviii. 17). All history presents to us no such intensity of

appeal, as with graduated pleas, the patriarch besought that judgment might be turned away. What man could have done more for men than he, with all the wealth of a tender, sympathetic heart!

But the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrah were too iniquitous to avert the approaching doom. For the sake of the race, the cancer must be rooted out. And there was Lot, too, already grievously backslidden. From pitching his tent "*toward* Sodom," he had come to reside *within* the city. He had risen in social influence, but steadily declined in spiritual force. "His righteous soul was vexed" at the evil that he saw (2 Pet. ii. 7), but his enervated soul left him powerless to cope with it. "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!" (Mark x. 23). Wife and children, daughters and sons-in-law, had been caught in the swirl of worldliness, if not held in the grip of vice. His works were all burned up, though he was delivered—"yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 15). The man who was the friend of no one but himself, inevitably became his own worst enemy. For the selfish life becomes the sinful life, and the sinner must suffer the penalty of his sin. "For what is a

man profited, if he gain the whole world, and LOSE HIS SOUL?"

Pauper and Prince.

Lot is the best alternative the world can offer to the saint. "Don't be too rigid and particular. Look after yourself, and give religion its fair show"—such is the worldling's advice to the Christian; and Lot is a sample of the product. "Seek first God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added," is the Divine command; and Abram is the pattern according to the promise.

Lot was "vexed" at the sins of others, but was careless of his own soul's state. Abram, we may be sure, sorrowed for his own sin, and went back to Bethel to renew his vows at the sacrificial altar.

Lot was a profiteer, with his affections set on things of earth. Abram was a prophet, a man of vision, with his heart fixed on the things of God.

Lot would not pay the price that "his righteous soul" demanded, and so lost all. Abram let God manage his affairs, and prospered beyond his dreams.

Abram was always a wanderer, but at last

he won his kingdom. Lot was essentially a wobbler, and lost all the position he had sought.

Whose was the real estate, whose the better part? Which the prince and which the pauper? "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." Why? Because "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." And it is the eternal things that count.

CHAPTER VIII

ABRAHAM

FAITH AND FATHERHOOD

THERE is no accounting for parental taste in the christening of babies, and apparent eccentricity is not lacking in the names found among Biblical families. The arbitrary dictum of a father; the fond optimism of a mother; the trend of outward circumstance; an indication, however trifling, or a presumption, however erroneous, of early character in the infant—either of these seemed sufficient reason for labelling a child for better or worse, as the case might be. Doubtless in many cases the wish was father to the thought; and in some, we may well believe that in later years the wish of the bearer differed widely from the thought of the giver!

Terah's firstborn, for example, was christened Nahor (*i.e.* snorting!); perhaps the poor mite had a cold in his head and kept his father awake o' nights! Then Haran (mountaineer);

was this a doting mother's tribute to his sturdy little legs? And Abram (a high father); ah, now, here was an *exceptional* baby! In him were centred ambitious parental hopes, the fruit of a generous parental imagination! For ninety-nine years he bore this name. For eighty-six he was a stranger to fatherhood. Thus do the plans of mothers and men "gang aft agley"!

We may take it, then, that this hopeful appellation was a purely human choice with all its human limitations. As a "high father" he was a pitiable failure. Even his wife's desperate expedient which resulted in the birth of Ishmael was no credit to the family. Then the Lord took the case in hand.

For more than twenty years God had been assuring him that, in spite of his advanced age, the improbable should come to pass. But Ishmael was not the fulfilment of that promise. Thirteen years more, and when Abram was ninety-nine, God changed his name and enlarged his outlook. The patriarch should henceforth be known as Abraham—the father of a great multitude. His fatherhood, if not "high," should be broad and wide, reaching in succeeding generations to the uttermost parts of the earth (Gen. xvii. 1-8). And in fulfilment,

the dawning of his new century brought him the longed-for Isaac, as God's New Year's gift. To this homely little incident we owe the Divine words that have inspired full many a saint to courage: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (xviii. 14).

It is often so. Human hopes stretch out to their furthest limit without result. And where they end, the Divine begins. Ninety-nine years, as it were, of hopeless waiting! Then the first hour of the hundredth strikes, and the seemingly impossible becomes a fact. For often disappointment is His appointment, that He may work His purpose out in His own more excellent way.

"BY FAITH Abraham . . . was called . . . obeyed . . . went out . . . expected (looked for) . . . *received* . . ." (Heb. xi.).

The joy of the parents at Isaac's birth found natural expression in over-bubbling mirth (xxi. 1-8). Like the people of Judah centuries later, they could say they were like those that dream—the glad tidings seemed too good to be true! Their feelings were reflected in Isaac's name—*Laughter*. During his childhood and early youth, he was the lyre upon which they played the sweetest music of their

lives. Then suddenly it seemed that the precious instrument must be broken in their hands.

Was it that joy in the human was overclouding faith in the Divine? Had the material encroached upon the spiritual sense? We only know that God deemed it wise—and because wise, to Abraham's final advantage—to "test" his faith afresh. "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest"—how each phrase must have cut the father to the quick!—"and offer him for a burnt-offering" (chap. xxii.). What does it mean?

Remember that shortly before Isaac's birth, the Lord had said of His friend: "*I know him*," and as a result of the confidence had admitted the patriarch to His counsels concerning the cities of the plain. Following their destruction, however, other things had happened. Abraham had for a while lost touch with God. Occasion taking him to Gerar in his journeyings, he had recourse to subterfuge lest the king, Abimelech, should cast covetous eyes upon his beloved Sarah. It is touching to note that even at her great age she remained still beautiful in her husband's eyes. But *his fear was faithless*; it had besmirched his spiritual escutcheon.

Later followed the domestic worries concerning Hagar ; and business troubles with Abimelech about the disputed ownership of wells. Such incidents, added to his absorption and delight in Isaac, tended to create an atmosphere which might easily blunt the edge of a keen soul-life ; and there would seem to be reasonable cause for a special intervention on the part of God to bring back His servant to the first principles of faith and trust.

Happily Abraham was not slow to respond. To hear once again the Divine voice, which had been silent during the period referred to, was itself a re-inspiration, an upstirring of holy memories, reminding him that it was essential to KEEP FIRST THINGS FIRST. The test was two-fold—for while the purpose of the command was clear, the “place” of offering was not at first revealed. Faith was needful in regard to each.

It was not the first time that he “went forth, not knowing whither he went”—he had done so when “by faith” he set out from Ur. Enough for him that it was his Friend who led the way ; and, in leading, would also “provide” (ver. 8). What it all meant, how it would all end, he had yet to learn. One thing he was sure about—that his Friend would not let him

down. In spirit, John Newton's buoyant stanza might well have been Abraham's song in the day of this pilgrimage :—

His love in times past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.

Besides, when the Lord had said, "I know him," had He not prefaced and completed that statement with definite allusion to a promised posterity; all to justify the change of name from Abram to Abraham? No, God would never break His word; and, if not, then the problem of Isaac would assuredly be solved, he had no doubt of that. So father and son "went both of them together." Fear had slunk away and faith was leading in the van.

Abraham was not play-acting when he "took the knife to slay his son." He flinched not, simply because he feared not. He had already assured his servants, when he left them on the road, that he would not return alone: "I *and the lad* will go yonder and worship, and *will come again* to you" (ver. 5). He knew not how, but he knew it would be so; and that even if, failing any restraining word from his Friend, the knife had to take the fatal plunge into the heart of his son, yet "God was

able to *raise him up*, even from the dead" (Heb. xi. 19)—as, indeed, He *must* do if the definite promise, "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*" (Gen. xxi. 12), were to issue in actuality. Knowing God as he did, he had long ago asked a question which his own heart had answered in the affirmative: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (xviii. 25). Nor was he any less sure of it now.

Questionings.

Abraham could have put forth many objections; and when he ceased, his wife could have carried on with more! The command was—

A Trial of Reason.—Should a father under any circumstances slay his son? How could such an act accord with piety? How could a dead youth ever become the progenitor of nations? Further—

A Trial of Heart.—Why should Isaac be the chosen victim? Why not Ishmael, the less loved son, if either? And why prolong the agony of the bereavement by a prior three days' journey? And also—

A Trial of Soul.—Such a command might have been expected from an all-powerful tyrannical.

king ; but that it should have come from God !
God the Promiser, Protector, Shield, Reward !
Was this how his loyalty was to be repaid ?

The Answer.

There was only one. "Abraham believed God" (xv. 6) ; believed that as his Divine Friend, He would never dishonour His word ; that as the Divine Judge, He would never do a wrong ; that as the Divine Father, He would never break another father's heart. GOD is the sole, yet sufficient, answer to every problem He sets for any man to answer.

So Abraham—"accounting" (Heb. xi. 19), reckoning, calculating the *pros* and *cons* during those three distracting days—arrived at the place appointed with a calm and quiet mind, and a more than ever trustful heart ; fully assured that—because God *was* God—He would not, could not, fail. Abraham made no "mistake" (as some affirm) in offering Isaac. The very decision to obey was at once a sedative to fear and a stimulus to faith ; and in the result he found that his own estimate of God was right, that God had vindicated His own character, that in his beloved boy there had been forged a new link between himself

and his Friend, and a new fellowship between the father and the son.

Type and Antitype.

We cannot pass from this memorable occurrence without noting its still deeper spiritual significance. Alike in coincidence and contrast—having due regard to human limitations—we see in it the basal features which illustrate the work of DIVINE REDEMPTION. Not under the pressure of an external command, but arising from His own love for man, and with no saving Voice to stay His purpose, God “spared not His own Son”—“only-begotten” and “beloved”—“but delivered Him up for us all.”

One at heart with the Father, the Son “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

In that supreme sacrifice, “mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other.” For the Judge of all the earth and the Father of love are one.

And why? “That we which live should not henceforth live unto ourselves,” but should present our bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” which is our “reasonable service.”

All this, in embryo, is easily recognisable in Abraham's willingness to obey the Divine injunction, although Infinite Love did not require the sacrifice to be completed. The command was admittedly *a test*, and as such it did not fail. "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me" (ver. 12).

And further, we recall how the Lord Jesus said: "Abraham saw My day and was glad" (John viii. 56). "In figure," Isaac was received back from the dead (Heb. xi. 19); and Abraham, "Friend of God," was the first mortal to learn the lesson of resurrection truth.

Once more the Divine promises were renewed, and with even greater fulness; for Abraham had proved himself a man whom God could trust. And Paul, another recipient of spiritual revelation, links the patriarch to God's children of later date when he says: "So then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. iii. 9).

CHAPTER IX

MELCHIZEDEK

THE MAN OF MYSTERY AND TYPE

IN studying comparisons between Abram and Lot, we touched briefly upon the battle of "four kings with five," in which Lot was taken captive by the invaders of Sodom and the other "cities of the plain." Here we are brought face to face with a mysterious personage, Melchizedek. Like a spirit from another world he appears from out the shadows, and as suddenly disappears again; leaving us in startled wonderment as to whether he belonged to Time or to Eternity—was human, angelic, or Divine. Such is one of the problems attaching to his identity. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (probably the Apostle Paul) describes him as "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. vii. 3).

Three explanations have been suggested of this strange description:—

First.—That in the *Biblical record* all details of his genealogy and length of life are lacking. It introduces him with unusual abruptness, recording a single act, and leaving us in ignorance of all the rest. In common parlance most of us have heard this sort of remark made concerning a person who had appeared suddenly on a particular scene: "He seemed to come *from nowhere*"; or this, of one who as suddenly left it: "He vanished *into space*." Obviously such descriptions are figurative, not actual. In such a sense it may convey the Apostle's meaning to paraphrase the passage thus: "This Melchizedek was king of his people and priest of his clan, and the capital of his realm was Salem. Beyond that, we know nothing either as to his parentage or his length of days. None who were alive at that time remembered his birth, and none who were left recorded his death. His biography is completely lost."

Second.—That he was a *heavenly apparition*—perhaps "the Angel of the Lord," who frequently appeared to men. But that Angel, in appearing to Abram, Gideon, and others, is

always described *as such*; whereas Melchizedek is called by his own name, and stated to be king of a town in actual existence at the time.

Third.—That the description refers, not to the individual, but to *the eternal principles* underlying his royal and priestly office. Unlike any other, save our Lord Himself, he was both king and priest, and is described by the same writer as “first by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of Peace.” Now righteousness and peace are eternal principles, untrammelled by time or place or parentage; and they find their complete fulfilment in the Lord Himself, who, as Mediator between the perfection of God and the frailty of man, was the Divine means by which “mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other” (Ps. lxxxv. 10). Therefore, in representing these eternal principles, Melchizedek was “like unto the Son of God.”

The incident in Genesis, however, taken as it stands, introduces Melchizedek clearly *as a man*; while the subsequent references to him in Psalm cx. and Hebrews v., vi., and vii. lay the emphasis upon the Divine aspect of his life and character. In this he is peculiarly

typical of our Lord, who, while truly human, was essentially Divine.

Taking Melchizedek, then, as we find him—with due regard to all the uncertainties already indicated—let us try to picture him as a *man*, as a *king*, as a *priest*, and as a *type of Christ*.

As a Man.

Accepting the view that in actuality he existed as such, we are at once struck with the fact that here was a *good man in an obscure place*. Perhaps most of us had thought there was only one man of that sort in all the land of Canaan just then, namely, Abram; no hint of any other having been vouchsafed to us so far—unless we include the doubtful Lot.

In later times, we find Salem synonymous with Jerusalem; but at this early period it would be, at best, no more than an obscure hamlet—not to be compared in size or influence with Sodom or Gomorrah, for example. Yet here was a man, shut away from the wider world, living in a degree of nearness to God to which even Abram had not attained with unbroken continuity; exercising kingly and priestly functions in days when the very meaning of the word “priest” was hardly

known. He reminds us somewhat of those seven thousand faithful ones in Elijah's time, upon whom God could lay His hand when needed, though their very existence was unknown to the senior prophet of their day. Truly, "the Lord knoweth them that are His," and upon such He sets His seal, whether it be two thousand years before Christ or two thousand after.

And further, we may regard Melchizedek as *a good man amid evil surroundings*. For Sodom itself was less than a score of miles away! Yet his soul remained untainted and his faith serene. He knew God; and this gave him a spiritual insight which assured him that the iniquity vaunting itself upon the throne to-day would to-morrow lie scattered in the dust. His vision was one of far horizons. He looked on men and things in a true proportion. His perspective was correctly sighted in the ultimate rule of God. "Happy is the man whose God is the Lord." Well may the Apostle break forth with the admiring exclamation: "How great this man was!" (Heb. vii. 4).

As a King.

Clearly Melchizedek took no part in the serio-comic politics of his day. He had pro-

bably seen too many petty kingships rise and fall to worry about any of them. His one concern was to rule his own in terms of righteousness and peace. If he held aloof from others, it was not the weak act of one who seeks peace at any price; he would have peace based upon righteousness or not at all. From this we may infer that, if his own domain had been unrighteously invaded, he would have striven for peace, if necessary, by force of arms. Yet even so, his supreme reliance was on "the Most High God."

He knew also that there are other foes more subtle than those of the shining armour and the brandishing of mailed fists—foes within the city, within the home, within the hearts of men—and that peace from such could be had only by a stern *régime* of righteousness, alike in the kingdom and in the soul.

Thus his hands were too full to join in the quarrels of neighbouring potentates. None of the nine kings—four against five (chap. xiv.)—sought his aid. He was not of their ilk. Perhaps they thought he would be more of an embarrassment than an advantage. They were out for spoils and indemnities, whichever side should prove victorious. Their scheme

of righteousness was, best man, top dog! And their condition of peace was plunder and rapine. Morally there was not a pin's head to choose between them; and either side was the Germany of its day. In all the blood and slush of Flanders, our human ground of hope lay in the claim of Britain, for which her sons were fighting, that only a peace based on righteousness was worth having, and only that was worth contending for.

As a Priest.

Whatever else he knew, Melchizedek knew the value of sacred things. In his palace—if he had one—there would surely be a little sanctuary, veritably holy ground to a holy man, who—

Whene'er he left the silence of that happy meeting-place,
Would bear the shining image of [his Maker] in his face.

It was this that gave him influence; here was his source of power. Missionaries in heathen lands are familiar enough with so-called "holy men," who are absolutely idolised and feared by the common people. We cannot doubt that, for truer reasons, both sentiments were expressed towards Melchizedek. His benediction was peace, but his demand was right

living; and that meant penalty to the wrongdoer. If, as king, he enforced his laws, it was as priest he *made* them. They were rooted and grounded in his own experience of God.

At first sight it may seem that in bringing forth "bread and wine" to refresh Abram and his servants, weary after their pursuit and conquest of the invaders, Melchizedek was merely acting the part of a hospitable and generous man; or showing a king's natural appreciation of heroes who had averted possible danger from his own realm. But who of us can fail to see in those familiar elements a foretoken of the Last Supper of our Lord, with all its wealth of spiritual significance? Surely the priest blended with the man in the gift to Abram; nor was the patriarch slow to recognise the spiritual character and function of the remarkable personage who "blessed him" in the name of "the Most High God." And as the victorious visitor bowed his head to receive the priestly benediction, his heart was stirred to lay at his feet a tenth of all he had. And Melchizedek accepted it in his capacity as a priest, *i.e.*, as *God's representative*.

That a priesthood involves the offering of sacrifice and that we have no record of Mel-

chizedek performing this rite, need not trouble us; for as early as the time of Abel we find the practice known, and Abram himself repeatedly performed it. There is no improbability, therefore, about Melchizedek both knowing and practising the rite as one of his priestly functions. And again, his priesthood is confirmed by the words of Hebrews vii. 5: "They who receive the office of the priesthood have a *commandment to take tithes* of the people, according to the law." This was true of the priestly tribe of Levi, and, as the Apostle declares: "Levi paid tithes in Abraham, for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him."

As a Type of Christ.

From the terms used in Melchizedek's benediction—"Blessed be the Most High God, Possessor [literally, Creator, or Framer] of heaven and earth"—some expositors, with Rationalistic or Unitarian bias, explain his conception of God as broadly pantheistic, and devoid of any Evangelical significance; as if God were but one among many deities, albeit the greatest and most powerful of them all. They liken Melchizedek to an Arch-Druid,

embodying the belief of that cult in the worship of "God the Mighty"; or to a Master Freemason who defines the Almighty as "the Great Architect." But the Bible—the only source from which we learn that Melchizedek ever existed—tells us clearly that the Divine Priesthood of Christ was "*after the order of Melchizedek*"; proving that no lower comparisons are of any weight. We note also that Abram himself used the same phrase—"The Lord, the Most High God"—in addressing the King of Sodom; and none would venture to compare the patriarch, whose intimacy with the Divine won for him the title of "the friend of God," as either a Freemason or a Druid!

In Psalm cx., we find: "The Lord said unto my Lord . . . Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"; and this is elaborated at great length in Hebrews (chaps. iv., vi., and vii.).

From these and other Scriptures we learn:—

(a) That the priesthood of Melchizedek was *superior to that of Aaron*, and is comparable only to that of Christ.

(b) That as the record of Melchizedek's life and the eternal principles for which he stood were "without beginning of days or end of

life," so Christ held His Priesthood "by the power of an endless life."

(c) That as Melchizedek *asked no spiritual credentials* of Abram, but "blessed him," though a passing stranger, so the Priesthood of Christ is universal, is not limited by external rites or ceremonies, and is not exclusive to any particular race or people.

(d) That as Melchizedek brought *bread and wine* to accompany the blessing, so our Lord consecrated these simple elements by which we are to "show forth His death till He come."

(e) That supremely in Christ (as typically in Melchizedek), we find the MAN who "was made flesh and dwelt among us"; the KING who is now "seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, waiting until His enemies be made His footstool"; the PRIEST "who ever liveth to make intercession" for us; whose name is "the Lord our *Righteousness*," and who said to His sorrowing disciples: "My *peace* I leave with you . . . not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

Christ our *Example* in human life—this we admit to be the ideal to follow. Christ our *Advocate and Intercessor*—these we readily

acknowledge, thankful to receive the benefits implied. But Christ our *High Priest*—do we systematically put into His hand “tithes of all”? Tithes of our time and our talents; tithes of our best in body, mind, health, and strength? Tithes of what we are and what we ought to be? And Christ our *King*—do we always bow to His authority and give Him entire and glad allegiance?

These are the questions that come to us from out the misty shadows that enshroud the person of Melchizedek. These are the claims we have to meet in the Person of our Divine and Everlasting Lord.

CHAPTER X

SARAI, ABRAM'S WIFE

FAIR AND FAULTY

WE are first introduced to Abram's wife under the name of Sarai, meaning, "She who contends"—not a promising outlook for a man who hopes to be "happy though married"! That, at least, is the interpretation of her name given by one eminent scholar and theologian—Ewald. Others appeal more to the popular imagination by denoting her, "My Princess." Had Abram been able to choose, the latter would certainly have been more to his mind. Without unduly straining either, we may perhaps combine the two. For even princesses are humanly liable to occasional petulance and temper; while among humbler folk may be found ladies whom their devoted swains once regarded as princesses, but, later, found them less adorable than they had supposed.

Outwardly Sarai was very fair (Gen. xii. 14),

and Abram was not too saintly to appreciate good looks. So beauty won the day; and like many another ardent lover, he married the woman of his choice, and hoped for the best, as husbands always do. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the union proved, in the main, other than a happy one. Yet on two occasions the beauty that he so much admired gave rise to perplexing situations, and led him into untruthfulness. It happened also that his wife's "contentiousness" was poured out, not so much upon him as upon Hagar, their Egyptian serving-maid. Not till years later did God change her name to Sarah, meaning "Queen," or "Mother of kings."

The Common Task.

They were already married when Abram first appears upon the scene of history. Away in Ur of the Chaldees he had set his heart upon her—"in the spring," perchance, when "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love"! Sarai was one of the family party who set out for the land of Canaan at God's command. How far she was personally convinced of the Divine leading, we need not inquire; suffice it that there is no suggestion

in the record of any objection on her part. But in those days—as in the East to-day—the safe policy of wives was to obey their husbands, on the easy principle that, “A still tongue makes a wise head.” Whether she rebelled inwardly is another matter. If her mind agreed with her name, she probably did. Outwardly, however, she moved along the line of least resistance.

The one fly in the ointment of their domestic bliss was that they both reached what nowadays is called old age, and still were childless. On this account she would fall a victim to popular reproach, ill-natured jests, and unbearable contempt. First, there were natural hopes; then the “hope deferred” which, after a time, “makes the heart sick.” We can well believe that the spirit of contention, inwardly at any rate, led her to chafe against the fate to which Nature had consigned her, and embittered her ideas of life; until, as the kindest thing to herself (and certainly to her husband), she settled down to her disappointment, and carried on her other domestic duties with the meekest grace she could.

Nor, in estimating her character, must we forget how very uncertain and unusual those domestic functions were during the second half

of her life, before she died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. For that was the period of Abram's wanderings, from Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, and in Canaan itself from north to south and east to west. Some wives become "contentious" if their husbands are occasionally late for meals, or require them at irregular hours. But for considerably more than half-a-century Sarai was not even sure, when the breakfast things were cleared away, where the supper would be laid—it might be a score of miles away. Nor did this happen once, but frequently. It certainly says much for her self-restraint if her husband's peace of mind was not oftentimes disturbed by a piece of hers! Without question Sarai had some very trying times, enough to aggravate a saint, as some would say. Any capable housewife will appreciate her difficulties. Saintliness came readily to the man who so consciously and manifestly lived in the communion and presence of God; whose life was continually brightened with assurances of Divine favour; and before whom was repeatedly held out the promise of a son through whom all the nations of the earth should in time be blessed. But while we cannot attribute to

Sarai the same degree of sanctity as characterised her husband, she was at least faithful to her calling in proportion to her lesser privilege; and trod the lowlands of her duty with a firm and steady step; kept her temper fairly in control; relieved Abram of many tiresome details; and thus contributed no small share of practical piety in making it easier for him to dwell among the mountain-peaks of spirituality. And surely that was no contemptible part to play!

Two thoughts emerge, thus far, from the study of her homely personality:—

Religion and Character.

The religion that *helps to hold in check our natural failings*, of whatever sort they be, is a religion worth having. There is no reason to doubt that, like her husband, Sarai had in early life “turned from idols to serve the Living God.” Nevertheless, she had a marked propensity for untruthfulness. And, to be perfectly candid, so had he—nor can we excuse it in either case. But these falls were the exceptions, not the rule; and which of us, if we are honest to our own experience, can venture to cast a stone at those whose lapses were probably

more rare than ours? With us, as with them, the only remedy for failure of any kind lies in the cleansing and keeping power of God ; and *that* is the religion which, above all, is worth our seeking.

It is a great and unforgettable thing to have made the great decision to serve the Lord ; to abandon the old life of sinful ignorance ; to rise above a sordid and idolatrous environment, and to turn to Christ in faith "for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. iii. 25). But we are nevertheless continually exposed to Satan and his devices for our spiritual undoing ; and of all the snares that he sets for our feet, perhaps none is so common—while at the same time so cleverly concealed by the enemy of our souls—as temptations to untruthfulness and hasty temper. Against these and all other faults let us watch and pray, that we may be "more than conquerors," and walk in the liberty with which Christ sets His people free.

Religion and Circumstance.

The religion that *lifts us above the trials of daily life* is a religion to be prized. Sarai had her burdens, both personal and social, and for the most part she bore them well. To her

lot fell the daily round, the common task, with a monotony varied only by uncertainty. Whether her talents were ten or five, or two or one, she multiplied their efficiency by faithful toil. She hid none in a napkin or in the earth. According to her light, she remained loyal to what she knew. Her opportunities were limited, her time was spent amid the humdrum things of life. Her part was not cast in the limelight; yet she laboured, and laboured truly, behind the scenes within the canvas of her tent. In this she is a type of many other worthy women—wives of clergy, ministers and deacons, for example—who smooth the rough places of their husbands' public duties; nurses, too, who tend the sick with a degree of patient tenderness which is less than fully realised by the outer world.

And for all who, *for the Master's sake*, are "faithful in that which is least" (Luke xvi. 10), is the comforting assurance of Rev. iii. 8: "I know thy works . . . thou hast a little strength . . . and hast not denied My name." If the Lord knows that, it is to our credit, and our reward is sure.

CHAPTER XI

SARAI AND HAGAR

FAMILY JARS

WHEN Abram and Sarai returned from their ill-judged visit to Egypt (Gen. xii. 10-20) they seem to have brought back with them a slave-girl, Hagar by name, who proved anything but a blessing in disguise. The so-called "domestic problem" of to-day was not unknown in those far-off times, and probably Sarai had found it difficult to keep a servant long. Constant journeying would not appeal to local girls whose sweethearts lived near by; and "evenings out" would lose their charm when each was spent in a different place with no congenial company to be enjoyed. Hence, perhaps, the engagement of this Egyptian maid.

Lamenting all the while the absence of a child to mother and to love, Sarai performed an act (Gen. xvi.) which—while we may credit her with an heroic spirit of self-effacement in the

doing of it—revealed a lowered sense of moral and spiritual vitality. Any or all of the following motives may have inspired it: a genuine concern for her husband, to whom lack of family was as grievous as it was to her; a sense of wounded pride, arising from the reproach of childlessness, to which any Oriental woman in such circumstances was subjected by those who were more fortunate; or a desire to hasten the fulfilment of the Divine promise that a son should some day gladden her waiting heart. It was not till later (chap. xvii.) that the promise indicated herself as the prospective mother. The years of long-drawn-out disappointment had blurred the vision of her faith; now, adapting herself to local circumstance and prevailing custom, she adopted a policy of expediency which drove her higher principles to the wall.

Mistress and Maid.

It was a sorry business, and in time Sarai was sorrier still. She had pulled the trigger and could not stop the ball. For expediency never pays as a substitute for God; and circumstance or custom are guides whose untrustworthiness we have often had cause to regret.

Hagar may or may not have been a treasure

as a servant, but she was certainly a trial as a bride. Haughty by temperament, full-blooded by nature, her promotion upset her balance and wrecked her manners. She "despised" her childless mistress, and very likely told her so. That was enough — more than enough — for Sarai, and the fat was in the fire! Her "contentious" spirit bubbled to boiling-point at the bride's hoity-toity airs. She grew madly jealous of her, daily squirming at her "I-am-as-good-as-you" demeanour; until one day she vented her wrath on Abram, blaming him for having brought the Egyptian home at all, though probably she had had as much to do with that as he. Then she went for Hagar tooth and nail, and "dealt hardly" with her, so that the aggressive rival fled from her into the wilderness.

It is a pitiful little story of tempers uncontrolled. Both women were proud and sensitive, tactless and unwise. Neither tried to understand the other's point of view. And so wounded pride wrought mutual misunderstandings, leading to ill-feeling and open hate. If only they had each been patient and considerate, most of the trouble would have been avoided. Yet how often do quarrels, small or great, arise

among persons who are destined to live together! It may not be fair to put all the blame on one, yet it may be partly either's fault. Solomon—with a wide experience of women as well as of men—spoke true when he said: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city" (Prov. xvi. 32). And what is true of the "he," is true of the "she" also!

Presently, out there in the desert, Hagar cooled down, and lowered her defiant flag. She had no one to quarrel with but herself, and soon got tired of that. She began to feel very sorry for herself, and, let us hope, for her folly also. She had left a comfortable home, and now knew not which way to turn. So she sat down to think, which is always an effective cure for tantrums. Fortunately there was a well of water near by; the refreshing water slaked her thirst, and cooled her ire. Then she gave a sudden start, for she heard a voice; and looking up, her glowing eyes beheld "the Angel of the Lord." He addressed her gently, asked her what was the matter, and then gave her some good advice: "Return . . . and submit." That was about the last thing she had thought of doing; but, although it was hard,

the Angel assured her it was the only way. So she took the hint. It must have needed some courage to go back, this time with the white flag and the call of "Kamerad," to her irate mistress! The sequel suggests that Sarai also regretted her own contentiousness and did her share to keep the peace.

An Unfortunate Jest.

Hagar remained with her for thirteen years after that; but the old trouble was not dead, and later on it flared out again. Ambitious as she was for her little boy, Ishmael, the time came for her to be jealous of Sarai (whose name God had by this time changed to Sarah), to whom at last the long-promised son, Isaac, was born. The old mother, now a hundred years of age, was so full of joy, that she exclaimed: "God hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me" (xxi. 6).

And somebody did laugh, but not in the way she meant; and that somebody was young Ishmael, poking fun at the new baby! "Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian mocking." And not only at the new baby, but perhaps also at the aged parents

and at the joyful fuss they were quite naturally making of him. Presumably Ishmael's mother also joined in the exasperating mirth. It was an unpardonable thing to do; and this time Hagar had to go for good and all, together with her disrespectful son. Thus were her roses turned to thorns, her apples to ashes; and in this case she had only herself to blame.

So she found herself once more homeless in the wilderness, and on a terribly hot day. They had consumed the food and water she had brought with her; and still the lad cried for more, yet cried in vain. Thinking he was going to die of thirst, she placed him in the shade of a shrub, and "went and sat down a good way off, saying, Let me not see the death of the child; and lifted up her voice and wept." A truer mother would not have acted so, but would have fondled the lad in her arms, that she might at least comfort him in his dying hour. But Hagar was too sorry for herself to think of that, and so revealed her selfish nature. We could respect her more if she had thought less of herself and bestowed more care upon her gasping child.

Once more, however, God's angel came to her aid. But it was "the voice of the lad"—

not her hysterical weeping—that “God heard.” Nor did the angel come to her side as before, but “called to Hagar out of heaven.” Previously He had pointed out the path of severe discipline: “Return . . . and submit.” This time it was the path of obvious duty: “*Arise*”—drying useless tears, and conquering merely selfish sorrow—“*lift up . . . and hold*”—thus to resume neglected duty, with the touch of sympathy and help.

Discipline and Duty.

Now, *Discipline* and *Duty* are hard words to hear, and harder still to live up to, are they not? Yet they are necessary for us all. For there is nothing worse than a life of ease and softness (which are only nicer-sounding names for selfishness). That is why God sometimes sends trials and troubles into our lives, to add strength to our characters and move our hearts to sympathy for others. If we refuse, we find ourselves like Hagar, “in the way to *Shur*” (xvi. 7), which means “*a blank wall*” affording no way out. But obedience brings joy, as Hagar experienced when “she called the name of the Lord who spake to her, THOU GOD SEEST ME.” We too often think of those words with a

sort of dread, as if God sees only the evil things we do. But He sees the good ones, too; and the familiar phrase is one to cheer, not merely to make us fear.

It is instructive here to notice the meaning of the names by which the two wells are called—for Hagar found one each time she lay distracted in the desert. The first she called, "Beer-lahai-roi," which means, "The well of Him who LIVES AND SEES." That is to give comfort in the path of Discipline. The other was at "Beer-sheba," which means, "the well of Him who PROMISES AND FULFILLS." That is to give strength in the path of Duty. For if we obey the will of God under all circumstances, He will show Himself equal to all emergencies. When things go hard, He "lives" to help, and "sees" to encourage; and when they seem hopeless, He not only "promises," but "fulfils."

And what of Sarah? The *I* had been taken out of her name; had it disappeared from her will also? This at least we may say, that in so far as she had changed the emphasis from her own desires to the will of God, she found her inward peace. It is always so with those who bide His time, believe His word, admit His claim, obey His voice.

CHAPTER XII

"HUZ AND BUZ"

(GEN. xxii. 21)

THE STORY OF TWO YOKELS

"H UZ and Buz"—the names might stand for anything, from cockchafers to Siamese twins! Yet they stood for distinct personalities in these far-off days. To us they are merely names, and unattractive ones at that; but these two babies grew up to rear families, and plant cities teeming with life and action, and so found honourable mention in the ancient genealogies.

Huz and Buz were nephews of Abraham, the two elder boys of a large family born to his brother Nahor. "Huz the firstborn"—that brief description strikes a chord of sympathetic interest in the heart of every parent who recalls the pride of welcoming a firstborn son into the family circle. What care and love were lavished upon him! What anxious

hopes were entertained in regard to his health, his stature, his career in the future years! Then came the day when a second little stranger entered the home — “Buz, his brother.” Perhaps his parents would have preferred a girl for a change. But there he was, for better or worse, large as life, lively as a cricket, and “buzzy” as a bee!

And so the boys grew up, with all the wants and woes of childhood, with all its little sorrows and joys, its pleasures and its pains; until, in later life, they took their place with the manhood of their day, gaining influence and landed possessions to which they gave their names; and, incidentally, both curiously connected with the life of Job—for that suffering saint was born in the land of Uz (or Huz), and Elihu the Buzite was one of the friends who came to comfort him. Rising to no high eminence in the history of the Bible or the world, they nevertheless did their bit for themselves and for others, and attained a measure of prominence which was circumscribed only by the limitations among which they lived and moved and had their being.

Personality.

We are surrounded by many such to-day, men and women, of no striking personality, who never attain to the first rank, if, indeed, to either the second or the third; business men, writers, preachers, teachers, farmers, workers in many grades—appreciated only by those who know them best, and neither recognised nor valued in the wider circle of the world. Are they ambitious?—their greatest hopes are doomed to disappointment. Are they unaspiring?—they accept their limitations as part and parcel of their allotted destiny. But lack of great achievement, or even, of keen imagination, is not necessarily a bar to fidelity in the sphere in which one's lot is cast. The only things to be feared are indolence on the one hand, or disheartenment on the other. The first will yield its own unpalatable fruit; the second, its proportionate weakening of useful purpose. But to be faithful in the small things is to see "something accomplished, something done," however small it be. And that will bring its own reward.

Huz and Buz stand for comparative "nobodies," as measured by the standard of the hustling civilisation in which we live to-day.

Even in their own time their influence was purely *local*. Compared with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—or even Ishmael and Esau—they were not in the running for renown. Not one in a million ever heard so much as their names. Yet they began life by giving joy to their parents, imparting gladness to their homes, and leaving something, at least, for distant chroniclers to record. They did their bit according to their opportunities, and, so far as we can gather, they did it fairly well.

Patience.

Note the immediate circumstances under which these two obscure individuals are introduced in the Scripture narrative. God had made exceeding great and precious promises to Abraham regarding the multitude of his descendants, which should be numberless as the sand on the seashore. Such a promise would certainly suggest to the average mind that Abraham himself would be the father of a large family to begin with. Yet he was eighty-six years old before he had even one child, Ishmael. Fourteen years more elapsed before the birth of Isaac, who was now in his eighteenth year and rapidly approaching young

manhood—yet there was no sign that Abraham (at one hundred and eighteen) was to become the father of another child. Is it surprising that lookers-on should begin to remark: "Either God is slack concerning His promise, or He has fixed His choice upon the wrong man"? Leaving Ishmael out of account (for he was not born in wedlock), Isaac was the only son in the direct succession of Abraham.

And this is, in fact, what happened. Friendly neighbours drew the patriarch's attention, by way of comparison, to the rapidly growing family of his brother Nahor: "Huz the first-born, and Buz his brother"—and half-a-dozen more. Obviously, Nahor seemed far more likely to contribute to the founding of a great nation than Abraham with his family of one! Such was the reasoned opinion of those who considered themselves fully competent to judge. Their facts were indisputable, and their deductions seemed eminently correct. Yet for all that, they were wrong. It was enough that in one of those wondrous interviews that Abraham had had with God, he received the Divine assurance: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called, and I will make of him a great nation." Other families might multiply with greater

speed. Huz and Buz might be only the first of a long queue, and Nahor might leave his tardy brother far behind in the race of prolific parentage. And yet—slowly though the wheels of Providence revolved—the promise was actually fulfilled in Abraham and his one chick, long after Nahor and his plentiful brood were moulted and decayed. Huz and Buz attained to local celebrity; but the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are found in every civilised nation of the world to-day. In the long run the tortoise beat the hare.

And so it ever is with God. His “mills grind slowly,” but none the less effectively for that. We murmur at His delays, question His benevolence, and even doubt His truth. Nahor flourishes on every side, unfettered by Divine restrictions; while the man who, like Abraham, has risked his all on God, seems as far off the goal of success as he was, say, thirty years ago.

“Oh, if God would only hurry!” we exclaim impatiently, as we look out upon the world and its sin; upon the unrest of men and nations; upon our prayer, whose answer is so long delayed; upon the incessant conflict ’twixt right and wrong; upon the discouragements

of Christian life and service. We try to believe that all will end well some day, but oh, "How long, O Lord, how long?" we cry, ere the promise be fulfilled, and the desired result shall come! The natural order grows apace; the spiritual chariot moves with clogged wheels. Huz and Buz are full of life; the children of the promise so slowly come to maturity. Like children anxious for the close of school, we try to thump the clock of Providence to make its hands move faster round.

Yet actually *God is never late*. With Him, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." He measures Time with the rod of Eternity, and "some day, some time, we'll understand."

Let us be clear on one point. It is quite possible that what we long for never will be realised in our lifetime. Abraham lived for one hundred and seventy-five years, and died, with Isaac as his only guarantee that God's promise would ever be fulfilled. Some of us may never live to see the answer to our prayers, or the needful vindication of God's righteous ruling of the world. We walk by faith, and not by sight. Our hope lies, not in what we see, but in what we know; not in what God may or

may not do, but in what He is—Eternal Truth, Eternal Righteousness, Eternal Light, “in Whom is no darkness at all.” And we learn *the fact of God*, not only from the fact of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, the chosen of the Lord; but also from the fact of Huz and Buz, and their brothers and sisters, independent witnesses of the everlasting truth of God. For Paul was right when he declared that even the *unprivileged* peoples of the earth are as vital a testimony to Divine Providence as those who are the recipients of God’s special favour. In both alike “He hath not left Himself without witness.”

“Be ye therefore patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” He comes to us in Providence as He will also yet appear in Power. His purposes will ripen fast, even though it may not be in your life or mine.

Purpose.

Again, Huz and Buz suggest to us the need of high and noble purpose. The name Huz means “Counsel,” or “Counsellor”; and Buz is “Criticism,” or “Contempt.” Broadly speaking, we may interpret them as *Helper* and *Hinderer*, respectively. Why their parents

chose such names, we are not told, as we are in many other cases in Scripture. We can understand the choice of a pleasing name for an eldest boy, while we sympathise with the less fortunate holder of the second. But now, as then, we find persons of each type—helpers and hinderers, counsellors and critics. Some there are whose warmheartedness and kindness of manner make them easily accessible ; to them we readily turn for counsel and advice ; they are like the sunshine, imparting light and brightness to illuminate the dark places of life and circumstance. The other type is cold and unapproachable, cynical and unsympathetic ; the last in the world from whom we look for help in the hour of need. Huz will always seek to strengthen our weak points ; but when we hear the sound of Buz, we more than half expect a sting !

We find them both, in the home, in the house of business, and not infrequently in the church itself—the friend and the fault-finder, the counsellor and the critic, the sweet and the sour, the helper and the hinderer. To which purpose do we aspire ? We all know which character we like the best, and which will leave the most grateful memory behind.

Let us examine ourselves in the light of how we appear to those around us; following the Master's example of kindly tenderness, never weary in well-doing, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

CHAPTER XIII

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

ROMANCE AND REGRETS

THE life-stories of Isaac and Rebekah are not among the most familiar to the average Christian. Rarely are they chosen as subjects for study either in the pulpit or in religious literature. Yet they are not lacking in romantic interest or instructive value. Nor are these characteristics confined to such outstanding incidents as the arrested sacrifice of Isaac, or the trick by which Rebekah secured for her younger son the blessing intended for the elder ; they are evident also in the more ordinary and less prominent facts related in the Scripture record.

I. REBEKAH THE MISTRESS

At the outset we are startled by the meaning of her name—"A rope with a noose"! That is enough to arrest attention and sharpen our interest. It is not a commonplace name, and

she was by no means a commonplace woman. Why it was ever bestowed upon her is a riddle we need not attempt to solve. There is a freakishness about it, on a par with the eccentric appellations that some modern mothers inflict upon their helpless offspring, and as incongruous as the tin-can attached by a boy to a dog's tail! Yet the mischievous sprite that whispered Rebekah's name into her mother's ear was perhaps wiser than either of them knew; for those who set nooses to catch others *are apt one day to be caught themselves*. That was the unhappy experience of Rebekah, who proved only too true to her freakish name.

Like the woman of Samaria, she is introduced to us at a wayside well, from which she drew her daily supply (Gen. xxiv.). Abraham, intensely anxious that Isaac should not marry into a heathen family, had dispatched his confidential servant, Eliezer, upon a journey to far Mesopotamia, to the family of his deceased brother Nahor, to choose a wife for his son. The objection that, to Isaac, Nahor's grandchildren were first cousins once removed, was of less moment than that his wife should come of God-fearing stock; and it would be well if Christian parents displayed a similar anxiety for their own

young folk by putting "first things first," and guiding their choices into Christian channels when the time comes to consider prospective matrimonial partners. So Eliezer went upon his quest, seeking counsel from God and relying upon Him for the result. Nor was his faith disappointed, for circumstances fell out precisely as he hoped.

Of all the village women, Rebekah was the first to arrive at the well, and this is in keeping with her active and practical temperament. There was nothing slipshod or casual about Rebekah! She was alert, eager, decisive, impulsive, considerate, generous. In ready response to Eliezer's request for a drink of water, she "hasted" to provide it, and then volunteered cheerfully to draw for his camels and their drivers until they should have enough. Back and forth she carried her pitcher, now empty, now full, until all were sufficiently refreshed; then conducted the entire company to her mother's house. Later, when Eliezer's errand was explained to the family and it was left to her to decide whether, instead of accepting the offer at once, she would take "a few days, at least ten," to think it over—not she! Her mind was made up on

the spot, and within twenty-four hours she was on the way to her future husband. Bethuel, her father, does not seem to have counted for much in the family palaver. He was ruler by right, but not by habit, and so contented himself with the non-committal remark: "The thing is of the Lord; we cannot say good or bad!" Brother Laban and his mother took the rest in hand; but experience had taught them that, whatever they might say, if Rebekah *wanted to go she would*, and they were not looking for trouble by thwarting her determination. So they wished her a substantial slice of good luck—that she might become "the mother of thousands of millions." Then, with her old nurse and maidservants to look after her, she waved the old home "farewell," and looked forward joyously to her new one. Nor was Isaac "too old at forty" to fall in love with her at first sight upon arrival. In due course the marriage-knot was tied; and whatever happened in later life, they could at least look back with tender memories upon this sweet romance.

Weakness in Strength.

But their married life was not unbroken happiness. For twenty years they remained

childless, which was doubtless as sore a trial to Rebekah as in the earlier case of Sarai. Then came the twin-boys, Esau and Jacob, and she made the sad mistake of favouritism, giving her preference to Jacob, only regretful that he had been born second instead of first. We can trace her dominating influence in his taking advantage of Esau's hunger to beguile the birthright from him in exchange for a plate of soup, as later she planned the mean deception of his blind father to wrest the paternal blessing from the rightful heir. As we presently study the character of Isaac, we may find other reasons why in some respects he disappointed her. Perhaps she had had enough of the "meek and mild" element in her father, and it accorded ill with her exacting and decisive temperament to have to live with a husband of the same ilk. On the whole, it seems too much to assume that their married life was an unqualified success.

Had she been content with the Lord's assurance before the birth of her twin boys that in due time "the elder shall serve the younger," she would have curbed the impatience and wilfulness which in her forceful way snatched Esau's birthright and blessing from him that

they might be conferred upon Jacob. She would also have spared herself the grief of losing her favourite for all the long years that followed. "Arise and flee to Laban my brother, and tarry with him a few days till thy brother's fury turn away"—such was her hasty counsel to Jacob; and in this—as when she had previously said to him, "Upon me be thy curse, my son"—she *entirely miscalculated the results* that would ensue. The words were lightly spoken, but heavy was the penalty of their realisation. Years of regret for one hour of wrong! For Jacob became an exile from her side for ever; and when he spoke of her on his death-bed, it was not as of an honoured mother, but merely as his father's wife! And the "curse" of deep remorse lay hard upon Rebekah, until she found her last resting-place with Abraham, Sarah, and Leah her daughter-in-law, in the family vault in the cave of Machpelah. Hers was a type of *strength that was actual weakness*. She had set out to manage her own affairs, and everybody else's, and did so neither wisely nor too well.

It is a dreary story of a promising life which lacked the best fulfilment. Romantic in its

beginning, it was pitiful in its progress and pathetic in its end ; yet full of useful hint and warning to ourselves. So much that was good in her seemed to go all wrong. The delightful eagerness of her youth deteriorated into impatience ; her strength of character got switched off on to the wrong lines of masterfulness and wilfulness ; her piety was side-tracked into deceit ; her winsome early cheerfulness drifted into the morbid self-centredness and bitter reflections of her later years. She who thought she was so far-seeing, lived to learn how short-sighted she really was.

And all on account of two deeply-rooted faults : (1) She was not content to leave herself and all her interests in God's hands for Him to manage ; (2) She lightly undertook to bear the consequences of unworthy ambitions, little reckoning how serious and far-reaching those consequences would prove to be.

It is always so. If we flout God, it is at our peril ; if we tamper with wrong-doing, it is to our own undoing. The "rope" of life and character that is straight and strong may greatly help others onward and upward ; but the "rope with a noose" may entwine itself

round the neck of the one who casts it, or at best become a hopeless tangle. The promise and purpose of God were worked out in her sorrow when—but for her wilfulness—they would have been worked out in her joy. It was as if He had to say to her, as Jesus did to Jerusalem: “How often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings—*but ye would not!*”

The one bright spot in her character is the grief that she shared with her husband when Esau married two heathen wives; and she cried: “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth! If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?”—for that was her dread when he had to leave his home. But if Esau turned out better than might have been expected, it was not his mother he had to thank; and Jacob's worst faults were those he learned from her. As a mother, she was unjust to the one and unwise to the other; and though the two sons joined hands to bury their father, there is no record of any tribute paid by them when she was laid to rest. Parents have much to answer for, who fail to bring up their children consistently in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

II. ISAAC THE MEEK

If Rebekah had the failings of her virtues, Isaac had the virtues attaching to his faults. His name means "Laughter"—not his own, however, but his mother's. For Sarai had first laughed to scorn the promise of a son in her extreme old age; and when that promise was so wondrously fulfilled, then she laughed with sheer delight. Isaac himself strikes us as rather a solemn soul, with *an intensely serious temperament*.

He has already been indicated as of the "meek and mild" type. As a child, there was an indefinable something about him that stirred Ishmael, his half-brother, to poke invidious fun at him. Well on in his teens, when his father led him to the mount of sacrifice, there was simplicity in his mild inquiry: "Father, where is the lamb?" As a full-grown man, he left a confidential servant to propose marriage to Rebekah on his behalf. On that one recorded occasion, in the halcyon days of honeymoon, when he and his bride were seen "sporting together" in a garden, we may shrewdly suspect that it was Rebekah, rather than Isaac, who was the leader in the fun! When the

Philistines objected to his being in one place, he meekly removed to another. When they choked up one of his wells, he dug one somewhere else; and, without protest, repeated this operation as often as they repeated theirs. And what man, even in blind old age, who was not something of a simpleton, would have been so easily hoodwinked by a son's hands covered with a roebuck's skin?

I mention these incidents, not so much to reflect upon Isaac, as to show how easily his essentially practical wife might become bored with such a complacent, simple-minded man; and how innocently he let matters of moment slip out of his control into hers. It may be granted that no one of these incidents, taken singly, would necessarily brand him as "meek and mild"; but collectively they seem to point clearly in that direction.

In passing, also, we cannot overlook two decided faults; first, the weakness with which he succumbed to the Oriental habit of untruthfulness, in saying on one occasion that his wife was his sister—a policy of expediency for her protection that showed a distrust of God and His ever-watchful care; and second, an evidently habitual tendency in later life to

pander to his appetite, in his "love" for "savoury meat"!

Strength in Weakness.

Yet there is another side even to what may appear to be undue weakness in his temperament and character. For he had *a deeply religious spirit*. When he "went out at eventide into the field to meditate," we can hardly doubt that his mind was set upon the things of God. His genuine piety appears on several occasions. To an unworldly spirit he joined high and sterling principle. Obviously he was of a shy and retiring nature, and would go far to avoid a squabble. The incidents of the wells show that he would suffer wrong, but never commit it; that he would rather give up his own rights than defraud a neighbour out of his. He is the first man on record who submitted to gross injustice, at great inconvenience and loss, rather than pick a quarrel or perpetuate an enmity.

He was *a pioneer of the path of peace*. For illustration, see the names he gave to the successive wells. The first he called, "Contention"; the second, "Hatred"; the third, "Room"; and the fourth, "The Oath."

Where there was contention, he sought to remove it by digging elsewhere. Finding that this only increased his neighbours' anger, he dug again, and this time so far away that there would be room for everybody. Such a considerate attitude brought the enemy to terms, seeking conditions of peace with this significant confession: "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee . . . Let us make a covenant with thee." And the same day God showed him a better well than all the rest, and he called it "The Well of the Oath." Outwardly, his life was a peaceful interval between the progressive activity of his father Abraham and the strenuous toil of his son Jacob. Inwardly, he possessed a nobility and gentleness of character that linked up the best that was in them both. For there is a type of *meekness that is really strength*.

It is always harder to give than to take, to maintain peace with honour than to fight to a finish. In all this, Isaac was a type and forerunner of our Lord, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." And in the long run it is the meek who inherit the earth.

For "those who take the sword perish by the sword," but those who are content to wait God's time, never fail of His ultimate vindication. They are wise who leave the management of their affairs to Him, and they always come out victors in the end.

CHAPTER XIV

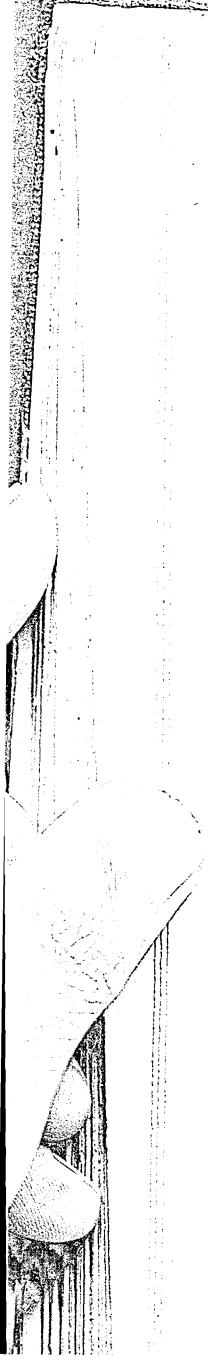
ESAU

THE MAN OF FIELD AND FLAME

THE name ESAU means *Red*; and it is characteristic of the man that he always saw the immediate present in its most glowing and highly-coloured aspect. Compared with this, the future—which in a wiser man would arouse more anxious thought—seemed to him pale and dull, drab and uninteresting. “Enjoy the present, and let the future look after itself,” would be his motto; and to him, following his favourite pastime as “a cunning hunter,” the more modern proverb, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” would make distinct appeal.

The Despised Birthright.

Thus, coming in one day faint and hungry from the chase, he lost no time in craving from Jacob “some of that same red pottage” which at the moment his brother was preparing.



Prompt to seize so promising an opportunity, Jacob at once replied: "Sell me thy birthright for it, then!" "Rather!" responded the hunter. "What good is a birthright to a man who is dying of hunger!" In a moment the bargain was struck. Among all the rest that we may learn from this incident, Esau's tendency to exaggerate the present at the expense of the future is startlingly clear. He was not dying, nor anywhere near it. But he *saw red*, and nothing else mattered. Ravenously seizing the plate of soup, "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way"—in all the red glow of immediate satisfaction. But it is at this point that the Divine Chronicler pronounces the stern judicial verdict: "Thus Esau *despised his birthright*" (Gen. xxv. 34).

Thoughtless and unstable as he was, he soon forgot the bargain he had made; and next we find him going a-hunting to earn the firstborn's blessing from his father, as if he were the firstborn still! And when the fatal truth was forced upon him, his "exceeding bitter cry"—"Bless me, even me also, O my father!"—rang red in every tone. For red was his colour through and through, in life and character—the colour of fire and passion;

of impatience and petulance; of danger, of disaster. But he ignored the signal and its warning, and rushed on where a prudent man like Jacob would have feared to tread.

It was the same when he married, choosing his wives, for the red glow of their gipsy beauty, from the rough-and-ready damsels of the desert; regardless of their future influence upon him, or of the responsibility he incurred by throwing in his lot with the enemies of his father's God. Living only for the red present, he banished the pale-blue future from all his thoughts.

Surcharged with animal passions, like the creatures that he hunted, he entirely lacked the controlling principles necessary to give his life a wise direction. He was his own worst enemy. Yet he was not all bad. His hot temper—which his mother so greatly feared, that she dispatched Jacob beyond its reach—quickly cooled to the genial temperature of his warm heart. He was equally impetuous in his anger or his love, in fighting or forgiving. Honest and generous alike in heart and hand, if there was one thing he despised more than his birthright, it was anything secretive or underhand. In this he was a great contrast

to his brother. If he had faults—and he had many—deception was never one of them. If he made mistakes—and he made many—he took no pains to hide, to excuse, or to deny them. He was clear as daylight, for all to see, to admire, or to blame. His heart was on his sleeve, to be loved or hated, he cared not which; *for he only pleased himself*. He might call himself unlucky, but none could ever say he was unkind. Men could take him or leave him, as they chose. He asked no favours and he knew no fear. Red he was, and red he would remain, though skies should fall!

But he was unreliable, uncontrollable, unbusinesslike, unstatesmanlike — in fact, uneverything that would fit him for a Prime Minister's duties, or the headship of a great nation such as that to which Jacob aspired, and through which God could work out His eternal purpose. *He lost his birthright in himself*, long before he lost it to his brother. We shall never fully know all that lies in that phrase: "Esau despised his birthright." But in part it means that he counted the promises of God and the destinies of his race as of little worth compared with his own likes and dislikes, his love of freedom and his hatred of

fixed rules. Can we doubt that even in the home he had often spoken lightly of his heritage; quite possibly twitted Jacob with having been born second, with so slight a margin of time between them! Nor would he hesitate to quote the opinions of his Hittite hunter-friends, that the birthright would prove more of a burden than a blessing, and that he would have a far better time as a free-lance. He might well adopt as his own the cynical rejoinder of the wild young Irishman who, being reminded by a sedate friend of his duty to posterity, protested: "Sure, what has posterity ever done for *me*?"

Essentially a creature of circumstance, and a man of many moods, Esau followed the whim of the passing moment. Irresponsible, jovial, gay-hearted—hail-fellow-well-met with all but the godly—his company was eagerly sought after by those with whom his roving spirit made him kin. He was such a charming fellow, with so much that was lovable about him! He reminds me of a man I knew—like Esau, a rolling stone—who entered an office much against his inclination, for his tastes were of another kind. When an important business matter was brought before him, he would pass

it on to his younger brother. One day the latter took occasion to protest, and pleaded with him to assume the position to which his seniority entitled him; and this was his reply: "No, old man, this is your show, not mine. Go in and win, and good luck to you!" It was generous, it was honest, yet how pathetically sad!

So with Esau; he was such a jolly good fellow to his friends! But there was just this about him—you *never knew where to find him*. He was off here, there, and everywhere; hunting, riding, covering far distances from early morn to dewy eve. Like "the wild ass that snuffeth the air" (Jer. ii. 24), he revelled in freedom, glad to be alive, as he would often say; yet leaving undone many things he ought to have done, and doing many that were unworthy of his godly parentage! Jacob one day disguised himself in the skin of an animal to deceive his father, but Esau clothed his soul habitually with the Arab spirit, and dishonoured his God. The contrast between the two lay here—the elder was "a man of the field," a restless wanderer, discarding duty and responsibility, living only in the heyday of present enjoyment; the younger was painstaking, methodical,

reliable, ever on the watch to grasp at new opportunities that should make his future sure.

The Quality of Leadership.

On the human side, that essential difference made Jacob inevitably a potential leader of his clan, altogether apart from the actual birth-right; for it is *character more than heritage* that counts. And on the Divine side, the man whom God would choose to represent His people must be worthy of the position, not only by a right conferred, but most of all by a character tried and proved. It was in a national, not a personal, sense that God summed up the two in His message to Israel through the prophet Malachi: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Mal. i. 2, 3). It was His choice as to *fitness for the headship* of a select nation, and for such the lot must needs descend upon the best. Also, as relating to the eternal destinies of the two brothers, or to their spheres of influence in the affairs of men, the deciding factor was character, and each was free to form his own. By what each proved himself to be, by that he would find his level, both here and hereafter. Admitting the unworthiness of Jacob's duplicity, the wrong

trend of his mother's influence, the amiable weakness of his father, and the attractiveness of Esau—yet, in spite of all these, the younger brother hearkened to the call of God, which the elder one despised, and each was responsible for his own opportunity.

"Esau despised his birthright." Are any of us despising ours? Have any of us been born to privileges and opportunities that we are letting slip in happy-go-lucky style? It is so much easier to lose than to hold, to be careless than careful, to drift than to swim upstream. We may not deliberately set out to play the fool, but simply fail to realise the value of what is ours by right, and so for one coupon's worth of pleasure we let our birthright go. And what of our *heavenly birthright*? Potentially we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," "partakers of a heavenly calling," charged with responsibilities that are supernal and Divine. Are we, as Christians, walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called? If not, for what are we bartering the birthright that is ours? Jacob cheated Esau twice, but did not Esau cheat himself a thousand times?

Here is the tragedy of the misdirected life—

what is once lost may never be regained. In our Lord's parable describing a king's invitation to a feast, we are told this about those to whom the invitation came: "They *made light* of it, and *went their ways.*" Just like Esau when he despised his birthright. But later, the blessing attached to it could not be restored to him, "though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. xii. 17). For at last there comes a time to those who persistently neglect or misuse their privileges, when, seeking, they shall not find, and calling, shall not be heard; when the nobler instincts, being dead, shall not be made alive again, and being lost, shall not be found. God make us, keep us, true to our higher and better selves!

CHAPTER XV

ESAU

THE MAN LOADED WITH MISCHIEF

WHAT was it that led this attractive man astray? Remember he was the son of a religious home. Whatever the faults of his mother or the idiosyncrasies of his father, Jacob was just as much exposed to these as Esau was; yet how differently the two turned out! His parents both worshipped God, and placed before their boys the Divine ideal, at least in a general way. What, then, switched Esau off on to the wrong line? The first cause was—

Unholy Companionships.

The lure and loss of evil associations! He was a hunter—no harm in that; it was a matter of daily food. It brought him into contact with the people of the land—he could not help that, any more than we ourselves who have to mix with the “all sorts” that “make a world.” But what he *could* have helped, was mixing with

them in such a fashion as to find *his chief enjoyment* in their company.

There was a boy, as well brought up as Esau, who found his dearest chum in a wild youth of the village, a painter by trade and a poacher by choice. It was quite legitimate for the boy to deal with the painter and his work; but a too keen interest in the poacher and his plans nearly landed him in an unfriendly jail. Needless to say, the poacher was a cynic in matters of religion—it is the easiest thing in the world to be cynical about a subject of which you know nothing—and it took years to erase the evil impressions made upon the lad's mind by his undesirable associate.

It was so with Esau. His father was the Squire of Gerar; wealthy in money, flocks, and herds; with any number of decent men in his employ from whom Esau might learn all the tricks of hunting he would need to know. But he wanted more. He hankered after the red, flamboyant glamour of association with the Hittites round about, whose clever feats of horsemanship excited his admiration. Naturally, they were 'cute enough to see the advantage to themselves of chumming up to the future heir of a great estate, especially one who splashed

in cash what he lacked in character. He suited their book down to the ground; and while he flattered himself at his "good luck" in securing free *entrée* to their society, they exploited his folly with a keen eye to their own profit. For the "yoke" was "unequal," and the heavy end was on his shoulder, not theirs. "Cunning hunter" as he thought he was, he was no match for the still deeper cunning of his Arab friends.

See him as he drops in at one and another of their tents when his day's hunting was done, to while away the evening in congenial talk. Of course he was conscious that they had no sympathy with the religion of his father. But (as they would urge), was not the religion of his new friends much older than his own? And, if so, was it not worthy of an equal, if not a greater, veneration? To a man of the world (as Esau imagined himself to be), was not one religion as good as another, if only the worshipper be sincere? Canaanite, Hittite, Philistine, or Jew—what did it matter? "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" Such was his materialistic creed.

And as to birthrights—the subject was sure to crop up in those evening talks—again the

same seductive arguments. Could not the Hittites trace their ancestry back to many generations, while his line dated no further than his great-grandfather Terah? In comparison with them, he and his family were mere *parvenus* and *nouveaux riches*! As well compare New Yorkers with the Ancient Britons! Was it not in those enemy tents that Esau first "despised his birthright"? Thus he sacrificed his home, his upbringing, his religion, his birthright-privilege, and all the mysterious promises that lay behind it, upon the altar of unholy friendships and associations. In this, as in all else, his love of the red present blinded his soul to the blue beauty of the nobler life.

But Esau is not dead. He lives in our cities to-day; thousands of him and of either sex, who have passed through a similar process of decline. He is to be found in our homes, as well as at street-corners; in our pews, as well as in offices, factories, and shops. Do we not know youths—and maidens, too—who are being lured downwards by attractive, but seductive, friendships and associations? Little by little they have lost their early love for the old home and the old religion, and the God in whom

they once believed; have turned, maybe, from the sturdy Protestantism of their fathers to the so-called older and more ornate ceremonials of Rome. Or, going to the opposite extreme, have been entangled in the meshes of modern "new religions" — Spiritualism, Christian Science, or what not. Still more have given up religion in any form at all. For Satan cares not which road men take, if only they forsake the King's Highway of holiness and faith. At first they "stood in the way of sinners"; then they "walked in the counsel of the ungodly"; and to-day they are found "sitting in the seat of the scornful." A perilous gradation *down*!

Or am I addressing some who are as yet only in the first or second stage? If so, beware of the fatal progress towards the third! It robbed Esau of the blessing which in his more serious moments he craved for, to satisfy the insistent yearnings of his soul. For negation brings no comfort, and worldliness no peace. For many, the message to Ephesus is, as ever, true to-day: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick—thy birthright, thy

privilege—out of its place, except thou repent.” (Rev. ii. 5). Then followed Esau’s—

Ungodly Courtships.

Welcomed with enthusiasm into well-to-do heathen circles, he would be speedily regarded as a good match by these long-sighted parents with an eye to matrimony for their not less wily daughters. “He is such a *nice* fellow!” the girls would say; and the mothers would add, in thought if not in speech: “Yes, smart and rich, and *not too pious*!” Thus, at the age of forty, he found himself with two ladies of the land to husband for better or worse, and, alas, the worse prevailed. For not only were his marriages “a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah,” on account of their idolatrous environment, but it is clear that the proud and perky daughters-in-law were two too many for Rebekah, with whom they were out at elbows all the time; so that, after expending much patience and more breath in futile arguments and protests, she exclaimed in despair: “I am weary of my life for the daughters of Heth,” with whom she was obviously bored to tears!

This made things very awkward for Esau, and doubly so. On the *religious side*—he was

tangled up with the coarse brutalities of heathen worship. On the *material side*—anxious as he was to please all parties, he could not break with his new relations. Nor did he wish to lose the influential backing which—with the substantial dowries of his wives added to his own inheritance—gave him a worldly position which grew to be as important as that of his father, and possibly more so; for we find him a very wealthy man by the time he met his brother again when the latter returned from Padan-aram. But he had yet to learn that wealth is a poor exchange for a man's soul.

True, he founded a prolific family-tree, and his progeny numbered "dukes" galore (Gen. xxxvi.). But among these dukes were demons incarnate. For high-sounding titles are no guarantee of moral respectability. And from these sprang Israel's bitterest foes, Edom and Amalek—a vile stock that had ultimately to be exterminated by God's command, in order that decent people might be freed from their neighbours' obscene religious rites, their bestial habits, their filthy contamination. *Such was the aftermath* of the man who first "despised his birthright," and then became "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. vi. 14).

Ungodly friendships are bad enough, but unholy courtship and marriage are infinitely worse. Many a husband or wife has had to confess in later years: "I was a praying man, a praying woman, before I married. After that, my religion went to the winds!" The Apostle's warning concerning unholy associations needs re-sounding to-day. "For what fellowship hath light with darkness, what concord hath Christ with Belial?" And it is well to hear and heed it *before* marriage, for afterwards it is too late.

Two Good Points.

Two good qualities in Esau, however, must not be overlooked. First, his undoubted *affection for his father*, as shown by the incident of the venison and the blessing. And later, he sought to assuage his parents' grief at his heathen marriages by adding a "daughter of Ishmael" to his wives. She was at least of Abrahamic stock, and somewhat nearer orthodoxy than his Hittite partners. As if such a compromise could undo his former error! Nay, it could only make his domestic matters worse, and provide yet another rod for his own back. For if "Two's company and three's none," what else could result than quarrels, bitter and

frequent, between the first pair of wives and a third rival for his affection?

On a country road, a few miles from Cambridge, stands an inn bearing the legend: "The Man Loaded with Mischief." Its painted signboard depicts a man toiling along with a weighty lady upon his back! Poor Esau, too much married, must have found his matrimonial burdens a heavy load. But worse than that, was there not a heavier burden on his soul? For no compromise in wrong-doing can ever answer well, even though it be made for a loving parent's sake.

The second good point is his generous *forgiveness of his brother* after their twenty years of separation. We admire him for that. Yet here again, it is significant to note that, after the reconciliation, he "took away his wives and all that he had, and removed from the face of Jacob." Why from "the *face*" of his brother? Did he catch a sun-ray of Peniel on Jacob's countenance? Was there a holy gleam in the former supplanter's eye that Esau knew was not there when the birthright and the blessing were filched away? Was he conscious of a mysterious barrier between them—not now of deceit, but of distinction—which he could

not pass? Jacob's face was changed, but Esau's heart was not. A man's face turns naturally to the object of his desire, and his soul shines out through his eyes. Jacob's outlook on life had become entirely new. No longer was bargaining his idol, or wealth his god. Like Isaiah, he had "seen the King in His beauty, high and lifted up," and his ideals were ennobled and purified thereby. Esau could not fail to discern all this as he looked upon his brother's face, until at last he could not stand it, and had to take himself away. Was it then visions of his boyhood, the lure of early memories, the call of the old religion, were appealing to his heart, and that he was too enslaved by circumstance to respond to them? We cannot tell. We only know that, in spite of their joyful burial of the old quarrel, the kiss of peace, and the heartfelt embrace that accompanied it, Esau abandoned the place where for years he had made his home, removing himself and all his belongings "from the face of Jacob." The man who, once so gay and boasting of his freedom, had trifled with pleasure's silver cords, now found how evil habits enslave with fetters of iron.

Thus even his "good points" yielded him-

thing but peace. In his creditable desire to please his father, he did but fail; and his forgiveness of his brother led to a further separation which was all the more pathetic because, just when they were most united in heart, they were most at variance in spirit. It was the *final parting of the ways* between the two. For natural affection can never take the place of that spiritual concord which alone can make two hearts entirely one.

An attractive personality or a genial disposition is no valid substitute for *spiritual character*. For "they that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but they that sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap."

CHAPTER XVI

JACOB

THE SMOOTH MAN

I N contrast to Esau, the "man of the field"—a restless wanderer living for present enjoyment, without regard for duty and responsibility—"Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents" (Gen. xxv. 27). There was nothing showy about him. He was not keen on making friends, had no desire for frivolous company, and was a far less attractive person than his happy-go-lucky brother. He loved the *simple life*, with its daily humdrum duties—one day very like another, and none enough to excite a mouse! In the evening he had no adventures to record; his conversation at the supper-table would be about the farm-stock, which concerned his father, and such bits of local gossip as would interest his mother. All very dull talk to a goey man like Esau, who, no doubt, thought him rather a duffer and a bore. There was too

much of the pussy-foot about Jacob, not excepting a power to scratch.

It is strangely characteristic of this self-seeking man—the younger twin—that at his birth he stretched forth his tiny hand and caught hold of Esau's heel: as if to prevent the elder brother from getting too long a start of him in life! Perhaps Rebekah told him of it in after-years, saying: "The birthright was very nearly yours, Jacob; you only missed it by a few minutes!" Thus might she seek to justify his anxiety and her own to hasten the time when the family heritage should be his.

But still waters run deep; and there was a good deal more in Jacob than his brother gave him credit for. In disingenuousness he was first cousin to Uriah Heep. He is described as "a smooth man" (xxvii. 11), the reference being to his soft skin. He was smooth also in other ways—in speech and manner, as Esau found to his cost. Yet beneath that calm and quiet exterior there lay *a keen intelligence*, an alert appreciation of opportunities to be seized at the right moment, and a dogged patience that could wait until that moment came. If at times he sat twiddling his thumbs and apparently counting the flies as they crawled

about the canvas of the tent, while Esau, the "hairy man," was relating some incident bristling with risk and adventure in the hunt, Jacob was really lost in thought, planning, scheming, and building castles in the air; albeit with the very definite and determined purpose that somehow, sometime, he would reach the pinnacle of his ambitions, even if he had to climb over his brother's rights to get there.

Efficiency.

But he was more than a thinker. Until his hoped-for chances came, he would *do the next thing, and do it well*. He was practical, painstaking, and methodical; farm and home alike received his industrious attention, and no detail was overlooked which he might improve. With his eye upon the future, he kept his hand upon the present; for all his dreaming, he never let things go slack.

These characteristics made particular appeal to a practical woman like Rebekah, and went a long way in making him her favourite son. If she had a "dearest friend" near by, she would have plenty to regale her with about Esau's faults and Jacob's virtues! Esau was so irregular; she never knew when he would be home;

he was so often late for meals, and kept the supper things about long after the maids should be in bed, if they were to be ready for their early work next morning. It was so difficult to manage housekeeping properly with such an erratic son as that. But Jacob—ah, he was so different! She could rely on him to a minute; besides, he was always ready to lend a hand when she was extra busy.

It was these shrewd qualities, so carefully developed by himself and encouraged by his mother, that made the younger much better fitted than the elder for leadership, and the headship of the family fortunes in days to come. For it is *what a man is*, not what he has, that counts for most, and character is far more important than inheritance. We frankly recognise the deep wrong of his selfishness and deceit, and make what allowance we may for the influence upon him of his mother's foolish favouritism, and his father's easy-going lack of control in the rearing of the two boys. Nevertheless, each created his own character, and marked out for himself the upward or the downward road.

And another thing. With all his slyness and self-interest, Jacob did *value the religious privi-*

leges that Esau so "despised." For the "birth-right" was more than a mere family affair. It contained within it the promise of God's future favour for the one who should best prove worthy of it. Always in Jacob's ears there were ringing the words that God had spoken at his birth. That promise shaped his thoughts and coloured his day-dreams; even when he was milking the cows, it was ever in his mind. And if God was all this ambitious man had been taught to believe He was, He must fulfil His word; and if so, Jacob would make and keep himself fit to meet his great task when the occasion came.

Efficiency is a word that we often hear to-day, and Jacob learned it well, together with the meaning of those other modern phrases: "Keep fit," "Do your bit," and "Carry on"! All these he did to the utmost of his ability. But he had neither sympathy nor patience with the equivalent of "*Napoo!*" Never did he reach the point where there was "no more" to be done, to be grasped at, to be achieved. His later vision of a ladder extending from earth to immeasurable heights, was in complete accord with the AMBITION that ruled his every act.

Yet all that was worth the having might have

been his for the asking—if he had only asked of God—without descending to sharp practice and deceit. If only he had relied more on God and less upon his own smartness and the keenness of his wits! The one thing he lacked was the *right principle* which would have kept him right. He had all the natural qualities that make for outward success; but he was a crooked stick, and had a stunted soul until, many years later, the Lord took him in hand, and straightened him out to better things.

Think also of the state of mind towards his brother that must have gradually grown up as Jacob, in his early youth, schemed to deprive Esau of his birthright, and later, of his father's blessing. If his brother "despised his birthright," did not Jacob despise his brother? Would not the selfish thought frequently come to him when they were together, even if he did not speak it out: "Our positions will be changed one day; my turn will come, and yours will be the second place"? This talking to himself, as it were, at Esau's expense prevented any mutual confidence between them or pleasure in each other's company; and so, as they grew, they drifted far apart. If Esau went astray, Jacob was partly responsible for

it. Instead of helping him Godward, he let him slide, careful only that he himself should be always on the spot to reap advantage from his brother's thoughtlessness.

The way he secured the birthright is a case in point. As already stated, this meant no less than the headship of the future Hebrew race. Surely ambition never soared to dizzy heights than in that audacious bargain—the biggest commercial deal on record—by which so far-reaching a privilege was cajoled from a weary, hungry man in exchange for a dish of lentil soup! Yes, Jacob was a man of great ambition; and this became his besetting sin which nurtured all the rest.

Camouflage.

But even the most astute can go too far. There followed the incident of the venison (chap. xxvii.), when Jacob gained his father's blessing by artful camouflage. This was a painful eye-opener to Esau. Whether or not he had suspected Jacob's duplicity before, he had evidence of it now; and we are not surprised to find that his anger bristled more stiffly than his hair, and that he also acquired the habit of talking to himself about his brother, saying:

"When I get my chance, I'll murder him"—a threat, however, which God mercifully prevented his carrying out.

Note, then, these two phrases by which Jacob is described :—

"A plain man." It is not necessary to be showy—nor even good-looking!—in order to be admired. Showiness may be no more than a coat of paint, hiding roughness or rottenness in the wood beneath ; it will blister in a hot sun and soften in the wet. But when plainness stands, as in Jacob's case, for steady perseverance in daily tasks ; for willingness to help at home instead of gadding about for pleasure ; for careful attention to the small things, and thereby preparing to fit one's self for the future—these, under right conditions, are qualities that win admiration and make for true success.

"A smooth man." This may or may not be so desirable. A smooth and even temper is a valuable asset ; for it saves a lot of quarrelling, and so makes life more pleasant to other people. But there is another kind of smoothness that is slippery, and even slimy. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah tell us of people who "speak smooth things" and "smooth their tongues" (Isa. xxx. 10 ; Jer. xxiii. 31, margin) ; and David

knew others whose "words were smoother than butter" and "softer than oil" (Ps. lv. 21). Such men were hypocritical, treacherous, and base; and Jacob had no small share of those vices. This kind of smoothness we must avoid at all costs; for insincerity is a trap into which many fall, and make enemies instead of friends.

As a Boy, the Lord Jesus "increased in favour with God and man," because He was obedient to His earthly parents in the humble carpenter's home, and went quietly about His Heavenly "Father's business" (Luke ii. 49-52). And among the most beautiful things written of Him as a Man is this: "Neither was guile found in His mouth"—a testimony all the more striking because it comes from the disciple who, years before, had lied, and denied his Lord. Is it any wonder that he reminds us how "Christ suffered for us, and left us an example that we should follow His steps"? (1 Pet. ii. 21, 22).

CHAPTER XVII

JACOB

THE BARGAINER

JACOB'S hasty chuckling at having gained the firstborn's blessing was soon changed to fear of his brother's righteous wrath. Acting promptly upon Rebekah's advice, he set out, like Dick Whittington, with a stick and possibly a bundle in his hand (see Gen. xxxii. 10), to seek what fortune he might on his uncle Laban's farm. It was a weary tramp for a downcast man, all those weary miles to Mesopotamia. With plenty of time to think, his thoughts must have been strangely mingled, with disappointment and chagrin and a conscience sadly ill at ease. It was a bad break in the fancied continuity of his schemes and fond imaginings.

Bethel.

Arriving at Luz, he lay down to sleep, with a

large stone for his pillow, on a hillside outside the town. There he had the wondrous vision of the angels and the ladder (chap. xxviii. 11-22); from which he gleaned assurance that there is more intimate connection with the affairs of heaven and those on earth than he had ever thought, and a definite promise of God's protecting care.

Yet, scanty as his luggage was, he had not left his SPIRIT OF BARGAINING behind. In an entirely characteristic vow, he sought to impose stringent conditions upon the Almighty. If God should agree to these, *then* he would serve the Lord, and give Him a paltry tenth of such wealth as he might acquire! It is so easy to tell the Lord, when we are poor, what we would give Him if only we were rich. But there is no record that Jacob ever fulfilled that part of the solemn vow he made.

Without doubt, the vision made a deep impression on his mind; but it does not seem to have touched his heart. Not till many years later did he pass through such a spiritual experience as is suggested in the beautiful and familiar hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." He changed the name of the memorable spot from Luz to Bethel ("The House of God").

But the effect upon himself was evanescent ; he did not change his ways.

Thereafter, for twenty years he worked on his uncle's farm at Padan-aram, in a sort of informal partnership. During this time he married two of his cousins, Leah and Rachel, and had a numerous family. He also increased his own live-stock at the expense of his uncle's by the simple expedient of secretly setting the stronger lambs, as they were born, among his own, and the weaker ones among Laban's ! In this he was at last discovered by his brothers-in-law, who lost no time in reporting the mean trick to their father. Jacob defended his action, on the ground that his uncle had already cheated him, and he was only getting his own back for that !

Laban.

As a matter of fact, Laban was just as much of a trickster as Jacob, perhaps more so. He had cheated his nephew over his wages "ten times" (xxx. 7) ; and also, after promising Jacob his younger daughter, Rachel, for his wife as a reward for seven years' service, he had palmed off upon him her elder and less attractive sister, Leah ; and then demanded

another seven years of toil, with Rachel as the prize. Of all this, Jacob reminded his wily uncle with a clearness and force of language that left nothing to the imagination. Yet, with all said and done, it was only the pot calling the kettle black! True as they certainly were, his arguments failed to convince Laban that they were just. More recriminations followed; with the result that Jacob gathered his family and flocks together and "stole away unawares"; and turned his face, by God's command, in the direction of his old home.

During this sojourn with Laban, their joint-estate had so increased as to cover a very wide area, and by mutual consent the dwellings of the two men had been fixed at three days' journey apart (xxx. 36). Consequently, half a week had elapsed before Laban received the tidings of his nephew's flight. With such a start—of which the fugitive naturally made the most—it took a full week for his uncle to overtake him and demand his immediate return.

Mizpah.

Much argument followed, until at last they came to an agreement to steer clear of each

other in future. A mound of stones was erected to define a boundary beyond which neither was to pass to interfere with the other ; and Laban returned home a wiser, if a poorer, man. They called the landmark " Mizpah," which signifies, " The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another " ; and young lovers of modern times, who exchange rings as keepsakes engraved with that magic word, read into it a sweet and tender thought that was quite foreign to the spirit which actuated these two inveterate bargainers. For they parted in a grudging, armed neutrality, each grouching over his own grievance. Their appeal to God was that He should " watch " to protect the one *against the other*, for neither had the least desire to see his cunning relative's face again. To them it was good-bye and good riddance !

Thus Jacob set forth homewards, in accordance with a command and a promise received from God. After he left Mizpah, " the angels of God met him," to encourage him on his way—for he was now in deadly fear of Esau, whose wide territory lay between him and home. They had not met for twenty years, and Jacob dreaded the interview, which he would have

avoided if he could. Having dispatched messengers ahead to find out, if possible, how his brother felt towards him, he was horrified when they returned saying Esau was on his way to meet him with four hundred men. Taking for granted that this meant hostility, he offered a panic-stricken prayer for deliverance. Yet, while he put his trust in Providence, he had by no means lost faith in his own ability to dodge a difficult situation. He had already resorted to strategy, dividing his caravan into two parts; so that if one were attacked the other might escape—no doubt hoping that he himself would lead the lucky one! Now he went through the camp again, selected eight groups of live-stock to send forward as a present to mollify his brother; and arranged them in a long procession, which would not only impress Esau with its size, but also give him time, as it passed, to entertain kindly feelings towards himself.

Yet all this camouflage was entirely needless, as Jacob might have known, if he had really trusted God. For the Lord who can make the wilderness to blossom as the rose had already softened Esau's heart. The real barrier to peace was Jacob himself, not his brother.

Peniel.

That night, "*Jacob was left alone*" (xxxii. 24), with only his thoughts for companionship; and what kaleidoscopic thoughts they must have been! He had been a trickster all his life, with a mania for making bargains to benefit himself, and not always honest ones at that. No matter who lost, if only he might gain! He was "supplanter" (or cheat) by name, and cheat by nature. He had bargained for the birthright, for Rachel his wife, for his flocks and herds, for release from his bondage with his uncle; he had tried to bargain with God for his own soul; and now he sought by the old method to gain his brother's forgiveness. Up to now, his only notion of piety was something to use to his own material advantage. God had wondrously revealed Himself more than once to this worldly-minded man; but the holy impressions had quickly melted away, as snow in the ray of the morning sun, revealing only the muddiness of the earthy heart beneath. Presently we shall learn how God brought him to his spiritual senses; but there are two particular thoughts that come to us from what we have already seen:—

The selfish life does not bring lasting happi-

ness.—The time comes when the supposed advantages of using noble gifts for ignoble ends is ruthlessly shattered. For Nemesis is never far away. After all the alternations of gain and loss, of satisfaction and chagrin, there comes the inevitable midnight solitude. Sooner or later, the self-seeker is "left alone"—with his plans and his thoughts, his conscience, his memories, and his own miserable, self-seeking self. His company is shunned, and his dearest friends have no excuses left to make for him. Well is it if then the stern but kindly Angel intervenes, and breaks the sordid power that binds. It may mean discipline, humiliation, and even pain. But it is worth it. For neither happiness nor heaven may be won by scheming, or as if by purchase at the bargain-counter. They are the gift of God bestowed without stint or price: but only to those who are of a willing and obedient heart.

It is not by spasmodic religious impressions which quickly come and quickly go — nor by panic-stricken prayers, forced from our lips by the stress of anxious or adverse circumstances, that we qualify for God's eternal blessing — in the dark hour of shame and failure, when we see ourselves as others see us, and meet God

"face to face," as Jacob did in his midnight experience at Peniel, there we may find hope in God, just so soon as we have lost all hope in ourselves. Then life begins afresh, because the LORD has taken it in hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

JACOB

THE PRINCE

HIS pretentious present of live-stock was on its way to Esau, and Jacob had also dispatched his family across the brook Jabbok for safety's sake, as the last hope in his policy of expediency. Why he himself stayed behind we can readily conjecture. His affairs were reaching a crisis which demanded serious consideration; he must take time and quiet to review the situation, away from all disturbing influences of people and things. That was on the human side.

On the Divine side, however, he was unconsciously being led by the Lord, who had been watching over him through all the preceding years; and the recent untoward happenings were but links in the chain of that wise and kindly Providence. Not that Jacob was expecting anything extraordinary to occur; yet it was surely God who thus separated him from all else, that, finding him alone, He might teach

him a lesson he would never forget. It was the "Watch Night" of his life.

His most serious issue was not in regard to Esau, but to God. Not his possessions, but his soul was at stake, and God was going to put a stop to his tricky, worldly ways once for all. The supplanter had tricked men often ; he had tried to trick God once, and no man can do that a second time. Now all this had got to be altered ; and, to begin with, Jacob must be made to realise that he was *not* the master of situations that he thought he was. He had always been a coward, bold only in underhandedness and fraud ; fleeing first from his brother, then from his uncle, as soon as discovery put a check upon his plans and peril in his path. Now, for the first time in his life, he was forced out into the open, to meet in stern combat an Adversary stronger than himself. And in that midnight wrestling at Peniel with his mysterious Antagonist—none other than the Angel of the Lord—he more than met his match.

The Divine Argument.

There is a flash of striking irony in the very method by which God brought him to his

senses and to his knees. *Physical pain* was the only argument left by which he could be convinced of the error of his ways; and when his thigh was put out of joint, he cried, "Enough," and accepted his defeat. It is curious to find that, five centuries later, at the same place (which in the meantime had become a fortified city), the same effective argument was used again; when Gideon "took thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he *taught* the men" who had rebelled against him. In extreme cases, corporal punishment is the only cure for evil ways, as when highway robbery and garotting were stopped by the application of the "cat-o'-nine tails," and the cowardly ruffians were "taught" that their pain was greater than their plunder. Some lessons can only be learned that way. Only thus did Jacob's real and lasting happiness begin. Halting upon his disjointed thigh, a pauper and a cripple in the presence of his Maker, he only then became *a man*, and the riches of his weakness made him strong.

With that marvellous great-heartedness with which God always treats a penitent, the Angel raised Jacob to his feet, saying: "As a prince thou hast power with God, and hast prevailed!"

He had won by submission, and, by stooping, conquered. Thenceforth he was to be no longer known as "the supplanter," but as "a prince" of Divine creating.

In the last chapter we referred to his fevered petition for deliverance from Esau as a "panic-stricken prayer"; and so it was, for it was inspired by his sense of danger. But it had this hopeful token, that it began with the words: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant" (ver. 10). He had at last abandoned confidence in himself and the trickery which had only led him into a *cul-de-sac*. As he sought some way of escape, his thoughts had turned backward to the undeserved "mercies" of his God; and from his own duplicity to the Divine "truth" that he had learned in his boyhood, but had so frequently neglected in his older years. That remembrance of God, with the acknowledgment of his own unworthiness, was the first step to better things. He had had religious impressions before—notably at Bethel—and they had passed away. Now, in a stern but gracious determination that it should be no passing mood this time, God had humbled him still

further, first by physical pain, and then by a tender revealing of His heart of love; and clinched the matter in such a way that henceforth there should be no going back to the old worldly, wilful life. The Good Shepherd would long ago have brought him to the same point by way of green pastures and still waters; but Jacob had persisted in his own way like a lost sheep, until by "thorns of the wilderness and briers" he was "taught" the folly of the rebellious heart. Then he "called the name of the place, Peniel," for, said he, "I have seen God face to face."

Thus closed the bad Old Year of his former life, and a bright New Year began. And here was the outward token: "As he passed over Peniel, *the sun rose upon him*" (ver. 31). It was a new Jacob who entered upon the early morning of that glad new day, the first of long New Years of a consecrated life. Thenceforward—

Heaven above was softer blue,
Earth below was sweeter green;
Something lived in every hue
(The Supplanter's) eyes had never seen.

Reconciliation.

Among other things, surely that rising sun revealed to his now sanctified sight the tawdry

paltriness of his scheming in the matter of his present to Esau. True, his brother had yet to be faced; but the man who has "seen God face to face" in the cool of dawn will have no fear of man in the heat of noon. Then a strange thing happened (chap. xxxiii.). Through the shimmering haze, Jacob's straining eyes discerned his brother with the four hundred stalwarts on the march towards him. Did his heart quail for a moment? If so, it was quickly reassured. Gazing still, he noticed how Esau cast but indifferent glances at the imposing procession of cattle that met him by the way, only hurrying to the meeting-place. With tremulous feelings Jacob "bowed himself to the ground seven times"—he who had never bowed to any man before! Then, to his amazement, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him." Instead of the long-expected wrangling, they "kissed . . . and wept." As if Esau, not Jacob, had been the erring prodigal; as if the transgressor were the longing, open-hearted father, with his elaborate present as the fatted calf! A hallowed topseyturveydom wrought by penitence and love!

Thus ended their long estrangement, and the old sore of twenty-odd years was happily

healed. Things always end like that when they are placed in the Lord's hands. We little know what we lose by keeping them so tightly in our own. And if Esau asked his brother what was the matter with his leg and why he limped so painfully, I think there would be a reflection of the Peniel radiance on Jacob's face as he would reply in some such words as these:—

"It is the price I have paid for such a blessing from the Lord as I had never known before. What matter if I go lame, now that in my soul I can walk with God? O my brother, if you only knew the joy that has come to me as the result of self-surrender! Life is a new thing to me since I gave my heart fully to the Lord my God, and His presence floods my being with holy peace and gladness."

"The sun rose upon him . . . and he went his way." Whatever may have been our past mistakes and failures; when once we "see God face to face," and read ourselves with His all-discerning eyes; and pray, with Jacob, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me"—then and there we may be born anew. Then upon us shall arise the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His beams" (Mal. iv. 2).

CHAPTER XIX

JOSEPH

THE WIDE-AWAKE DREAMER

JOSEPH was the son of Jacob's beautiful and favourite wife Rachel, for whom his father had served Laban twice seven years to win. None of us would care to live in such a matrimonial tangle as that in which most of the patriarchs spent their eventful years; but of his four life-partners, there was only one whom Jacob truly loved; and of his twelve sons he lavished upon none the same affection that he did upon her two boys, the youngest of them all. And if we wonder why Joseph, the elder of the two, was singled out as the old man's darling, we must remember that he had a long innings as Rachel's only child, and so a long start in his parents' love; also that the birth of poor wee Benjamin was the pathetic cause of his mother's death—a sorrow that left its permanent mark upon the stricken father's heart.

Yet still more we wonder that, having himself suffered in early life such deplorable consequences from the favouritism of his own mother Rebekah, Jacob should have repeated the same mistake with children of his own. It was unjust to Benjamin, and not less so to the other ten, to set his favour upon Joseph at the expense of all the rest. And as always, it brought grief to favoured and favourer alike; for a favourite is sure to find more foes than friends. But there it was. "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children; and he made him a coat of many colours" (Gen. xxxvii. 3). That was some coat, and it caused sore trouble.

In the happy days gone by, two undergraduates visited Brussels on a summer holiday. One evening, the weather being exceptionally warm, they decided, for their own comfort—and incidentally to give the public a treat—to go for a stroll in their flannel "blazers," of startling colours and designs. The observed of all observers, they soon found themselves the centre of a jeering mob. So an imaginative policeman locked them up; and they were charged next day with disturbing the peace, "clad in ridiculous and peace-disturbing garments." They

paid the penalty of their conceit in cash—forty shillings, or a month (or the local equivalent).

Somewhat similar was the effect produced upon his ten brothers by the gorgeous garment in which Joseph, as a simple youth, must have fancied himself as the topmost limit in “knuts”! For he was barely seventeen; and at that age who of us has not been allured by the seductive pleasure of personal appearance, if we had the chance to look a bit of a swell? And Joseph had, at least, the excuse of his fond but foolish father’s encouragement in this more or less pardonable piece of vanity.

But pardonable vanity is apt to lead to the pretentious growth of “swelled head.” It was not entirely without reason that his brothers regarded him as a bit of a prig. For at this period of his life he certainly did not err on the side of excessive modesty; on the contrary, he bored his hearers not a little with his fondness for talking about himself. This was doubly an annoyance, when it took the form of magnifying himself and belittling them. For if the dreams which he related with such gusto meant anything, it was that in the future he was to be top-dog, and they were to grovel at his feet. After all, he was only their half-

brother; and their indignation burst aflame, as they scornfully protested: "Shalt *thou* indeed reign over *us*!"

Already he had been appointed by his father to be their overseer, and the chosen manager of the family estate. So while they were clad in the coarse workaday garments that their labour on the farm required, he walked among them arrayed in a princely *robe of office*—for such was the significance of his wondrous "coat." This, not unnaturally, filled them with consuming wrath and envy. "They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him"; and when his dreams added fuel to fire, "they hated him yet the more."

But there was more behind all this. It fell to Joseph's lot to have to acquaint his father with certain scandals that had roused the indignation of the countryside—acts of treachery and immorality to which, alas, some of his brothers were prone. It was an "evil report" of their doings that he had to bring; and he did this, with far more sadness than satisfaction, we may well assume—for whatever faults he had, there was nothing of the sneak about him. And here we discern the essential *difference in character* between this younger and the older

sons. For at rock-bottom Joseph was pure in soul, his ideals were high, and his habits were clean; while, beyond these moral qualities, his intelligence and capabilities were altogether above the average. His brothers were essentially children of nature, in whom the animal passions ran strong, and whose minds moved among the material and baser things of life. Joseph, on the other hand, with his refined and spiritual outlook, dwelt upon the invisible things of heaven and of God. Granted that at this time he enjoyed the exuberance of youth, which is not always well-balanced in its keen enthusiasms; granted also that he reflected the unwisdom of his father's favouritism—nevertheless he was *qualified by character and ability* to occupy the position to which he had been appointed. For Jacob, with his shrewd business instincts, had not been slow to discover that no other of his sons could so efficiently fill the bill. Although we deprecate Jacob's preference for Joseph on other grounds, it was a sound, practical proposition to place his smart young son at the head of affairs. And the lad, by sheer capability, proved himself supremely worthy of the choice. The despised "dreamer" was, in fact, very wide-awake indeed!

Character and Capability.

These are, and ever must be, the deciding factors for success in life. True, they are not always combined in the same person. There are capable men who for a time succeed, but who ultimately fail for lack of sterling principle. Others there are of commendable character, who go down in the scrimmage of life from sheer lack of capability to hold their own. Combine the two, as Joseph did, and failure is impossible. Such a man is bound to rise; he will go on from strength to strength.

But the best of all reasons was that then, as later, "The LORD was with Joseph . . . the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (chap. xxxix. 2, 3). With God on his side, neither half-brothers nor hating brothers could hinder him for long, strive murderously though they might—and did.

Yet ability has its obstacles, and character its foes. It must be so in a world where Satan vaunts himself in bitter enmity to God. But though the devil can prostitute capability to serve his own base ends, he is always brought up short by the challenge of Christian character, which cries, "Halt! Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further: and here shall thy proud waves

be stayed." In the Great War, what was it that barred the furious German rush for Paris and the Coast, in 1914? Was it not that Lord Roberts could say with deep conviction: "They are praying for us at home"? And what was the barrier in March and August, 1918? Not only America's timely help; but also that two great nations had been officially summoned to public days of prayer. For *Christian character* plays no small part in God's defence of His children; and when natural capability is made its servant and not its master, He uses both to the achievement of His own eternal ends. Before following Joseph through all his rougher experiences, let us pause to heed the counsel of wise King Solomon: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. iii. 6); bearing in mind, however, the next verse also: "Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil." For God reveals Himself to those who are pure in heart and who hate every evil way.

CHAPTER XX

JOSEPH

THE TWO PITS

GOOD men catch bad enemies, as healthy ones may catch the "flu." Accordingly we are not surprised that Joseph had strenuous opposition to face. But the familiar story of his brethren's plot, successful though it appeared at the time, was only a prelude to their own humiliation and the literal fulfilment of his own unlikely dreams. For God always ranks Himself upon the side of Right.

"Behold this dreamer cometh!" they exclaimed, as they saw him one day approaching across the fields; "let us slay him and cast him into some pit, and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Gen. xxxvii. 19, 20). Yet their very speech was a tacit admission of haunting fear that there was a good deal more in those circumstantial dreams than they dared to acknowledge even to themselves. But they forgot that though a prophet may be silenced,

his message may yet survive. For however deep the pit, truth will leak out through the bottom when the man who speaks it cannot climb out at the top.

The Pit of Trial.

Still more uncanny and disquieting were the feelings that suddenly gripped the hearts of two of the brothers. REUBEN, anxious enough to teach Joseph a lesson that he would not forget, nevertheless drew the line at murder. He was the man whom his father, when dying, described as "unstable as water" (xlix. 4). A weakling, a vacillator, a halter between two opinions, he was swayed between his mad jealousy on the one hand, and a measure of affection for Joseph on the other. As the eldest brother, he might naturally have been a leader of the rest for good, or equally so for evil. But he had neither the moral character necessary for the one, nor the forceful influence that would have carried them with him in the other. It was entirely typical of him to suggest a compromise: "Let us not kill him; here's a pit; let's put him into it—and leave it at that." Lacking the honour that is reputed to exist even among thieves, he planned in his own

mind to come back and rescue the lad when the others' backs were turned. Meanwhile he would wait and see ; and with a feigned excuse for absënting himself from their charming company, he rose and strolled away.

Then JUDAH had his turn. His proposal was to sell Joseph as a slave to the Midianites, whose long train of camels, men, and merchandise, appearing in the distance, promised a solution as welcome as it was unexpected. Here was a chance they were never likely to get again—at one stroke to get rid of this objectionable young cub, and make a tidy bit for themselves at the same time ! That would be good business ; but "*what profit* is it," he asked, "if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?"

His brilliant idea caught on like a cat to a herring. For besides the cash-bonus (as welcome in those days as in ours), it would also free them of a ghostly fear—whose weird shadow seems to have already appeared to some of them—that effectually and for ever to "conceal his blood" was more than they could hope to do. If, once upon a time, "the blood of righteous Abel" had "cried aloud" to God "from the ground" that it had stained, was it likely

they could keep their guilty secret always undiscovered? And if they could, would not its insistent demand be heard by day and night within themselves? Would not CONSCIENCE still proclaim their crime? Henceforth their balance-sheet of life would glow with figures red with blood. Profit or loss! *What would they gain?* Riddance of their brother, yes; but what else? Memory, remorse, despair! *What would they lose?* Peace of mind, healthful slumber, the clear glance that could look their father unflinchingly in the face, the joy of earth, the hope of heaven!

Ah, it is easy enough to kill! A madman can do that. It is inability to "conceal the blood" that haunts and hangs. A crime may elude the detective, and cheat the hangman; but there is a gallows in the soul as well as in the prison-yard. It is SIN, not crime, that settles doom, and presents its bill for payment in this life and the next.

Let us look forward. Joseph's brothers learned a lot about corn and harvest when they went down to Egypt in later years; but in the grim meanwhile they had learned still more of the eternal truth that, "God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also

reap." They had swept aside their brother's dreams, only to be stricken with a perpetual nightmare of their own, which grew ever more hideous as life went on. They were old men when they cried in the bitterness of their remorse: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear. Therefore is this distress come upon us!" (xlii. 21). Nor were the majority of them any more soothed when on that occasion REUBEN sought to excuse himself at their expense, saying: "Spake I not unto you, Do not sin against the child? and ye would not listen!" Or when JUDAH rubbed it in—as no doubt he had often done before—and claimed the thanks they owed to him for having saved their hands from blood by his milder suggestion of a bargain with the Midianites!

Do you suppose they wrangled thus for the first time down there in Egypt? Surely not. The terror-stricken face of the ill-used lad, his voice shrieking in agonised appeal—had not every detail been re-enacted in their dreams with pitiless accuracy many a time and oft, since they had lied to Jacob about their brother (xxxvii. 32), and throughout those long

dark years of nervous dread? For "sin covers the walls of memory with dismal pictures; it crowds the imagination with revolting shapes; and turns conscience into a sepulchre or a dungeon of despair"! "What profit" for any of us to commit a sin? What hope that somehow, sometime, it will not stand revealed in all its naked horror, within the morbid consciousness of the perpetrator's soul, even though no accuser shall hale him before the public court? Verily, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

The Pit of Temptation.

It was this fear of *sin*, more than of its *consequence*, by which Joseph kept his own spiritual balance true and his actions pure under the strenuous temptation from Potiphar's wife. "How shall I do this great wickedness and SIN AGAINST GOD?" (xxxix. 8). Such was his high resolve. Rescued from one pit, he stood now on the verge of one of deeper slime. Potiphar might never know, but *God would see*. It was the sin, not the fear of being found out, from which he shrank; and so he mounted a big step higher in the esteem of God and men.

The pit of temptation is one to be much

more anxiously avoided than the pit of trial; for to fall into it, is by far the greater calamity. That is what made the Psalmist so joyously exclaim, with heartfelt gratitude to God: "He took me up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and He hath put a new song in my mouth" (Ps. xl. 2, 3). Can we doubt that in after-life Joseph looked upon the pit of trial into which he sank as in reality a stepping-stone to higher things; while the other pit into which he was saved from falling, would have besmirched him with a fouler mire of which he would never again be entirely clear? We shrink from sorrow—yet it may prove a blessing in disguise; but sin leads only to the furtive fear that haunts, and the consequence from which there is no recall.

CHAPTER XXI

JOSEPH

CAPTIVE IN "THE HOLE"

NOT a pit this time, but a prison, and of truly Oriental type. Such may be seen in the East to-day, more like the "Black Hole of Calcutta," of evil fame, than a modern well-ventilated jail. For what Joseph described as "the dungeon" (Gen. xl. 15) was literally (in Hebrew) "the hole"; and with that idea in mind we can more readily picture the conditions under which he passed, at any rate, the earlier part of his long confinement.* Was this God's just reward for his tempted child's fidelity? No, it was His way for fitting him for greater and nobler deeds. Purified gold must needs pass through the furnace; and the process as well as the results more than justified the method of the Refiner's hand.

* "Imagine a large, gloomy hall with no windows; paved with flag-stones, and black with filth; no light or air, save what may struggle through the narrow grated aperture, by which the friends of the wretched inmates, or some pitying strangers, pass in food and water. . . ."—Meyer's *Life of Joseph*.

Prison Amenities.

The character and capability that we have already noted in him soon found ways of expression, so that after awhile the head-jailer put all the other prisoners under his care; generously relieving himself of all irksome responsibility by making Joseph the custodian of the men and their belongings (xxxix. 22, 23). From this it is probable that, according to Eastern custom, they were allowed to make various articles from materials supplied by friends, and to sell them to passers-by who looked in upon them through the miscalled window. And it may have been part of the young captive's duty to superintend such work, fix the prices of the articles, and convey to his chief a large share of the profits, which that enterprising gentleman would be pretty certain to demand! For Oriental officialdom has a hungry pocket, which it takes a lot to fill.

It would seem that, in due course, Joseph was permitted to occupy more comfortable quarters than the general prison "hole," namely, "in the house of the captain of the guard." Here were entrusted to his keeping two prisoners of high rank—Pharaoh's "chief butler" and "chief baker"—who "had offended

their lord, the king" (xl. 1-4). Possibly they, too, had been comfortably studying their own interest, not wisely but too well, at his majesty's expense! But in the midst of his own sorrows we see Joseph's kindly disposition and *thoughtfulness for others* in his cheery greeting: "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?" Having won their confidence as their friend rather than as their inspector, he soon learned they had not slept well; which was not surprising. In fact, they had had a very bad night, with painfully disconcerting dreams. Joseph pricked up his ears at that, for if any one was keen on dreams, he was—it was quite like old times! Yet it was also a sad reminder of his own happier days on the dear home-farm. But even so, it only served to draw out his greater sympathy for their sorrows. So the dreams were told, and the interpretation given, much to the comfort of the butler, but the dismay of the baker; for the one would be restored to his old position, while the other would be hanged for his misdeeds. Which may suggest that the "chief baker" had been the chief wrong-doer, who had first cheated his master and then sought to shift the blame upon the less guilty, or perhaps entirely innocent,

butler. But truth will out, and in due time each received his appropriate reward.

It was a pathetic moment when the butler bade farewell to his imprisonment, a free man once more, and Joseph asked him to put in a good word with the king on his behalf, which he readily promised to do. But, alas, the promise was as easily broken as the baker's pie-crust. He forgot all about it for "two full years" (xlī. 1), and then only remembered it because Pharaoh himself had a disturbing dream. It is so easy to promise things in sorrow and forget them in success.

A Sure Anchorage.

But never once, through all his misfortunes, or his later prosperity, did Joseph lose sight of the rosy hopes that had occupied his thoughts from his early years.

HE KEPT LOYALLY TO HIS FIRST IDEALS.—Whatever importance he had attached to the dreams of his youth, they did not rob him of his strong, practical common-sense. He neither lived in the clouds, nor walked on air. None ever found him wool-gathering, or caught him napping. Cheery, trustworthy, sympathetic, he was also alert, keen, intelligent. If at times

he yielded to flights of holy fancy, he nevertheless recognised the downward pull of daily life, with its duties, trials, and temptations. The call of duty never found him too absorbed to listen to its demand. The lure of Satan never caught him off his guard. There is a pseudo-piety that fails in the stress of "the daily round, the common task"; that reluctantly exchanges the mountain-peaks of joyous emotion for the less romantic valleys of practical experience; and fails to watch against the seductive devices of the tempter. None of this could be laid to Joseph's charge. He was every inch a man, with a practical head as well as a pious heart; and the story of his life is "written for our learning, and is profitable to us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (see 2 Tim. iii. 14-16).

Yet in spite of his practicality, his dreams had furnished him with an ideal which, notwithstanding all his trials, he never lost. At times it may have faded in intensity, for in pits and prisons doubts and fears are bred. But he assured himself that, if his dreams should ever be fulfilled and his brothers should bow down to him on some distant day, this could only be as he worthily FITTED HIMSELF TO DESERVE SUCH

ASCENDANCY.—This task he set himself with all earnestness to do, as his father had done before him. And his ideal was, not to gain a cheap and tawdry victory, but to keep his own character well in hand; despising whatever was sinful, vulgar, base, and low, and cultivating only that which was holy, upright, clean, and strong. For he might score off his brothers, and yet win but a low place in the records of history when men viewed his life-story from afar. The only way to triumph over others is by first gaining the victory over ourselves; and we can only win the praise of God or man if we conquer by humility, and not by pride. The laurels of fame can be plucked only from the bush of sterling worth.

It is well for young folk to "see visions and dream dreams"; to forecast their future along right and worthy lines. But there come times when visions wane and dreams fade amid the stress of other things that clamour for attention. Happy is the youth or maiden, man or woman, who still holds fast to the words of Christ: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33).

HE HAD EVER A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.—We

sometimes hear a person who is in a difficulty say that he is *in a hole*. It may be one of his own making, due to his own stupidity, or the consequence of his own wrong-doing: It is well, on the other hand, if he can truly say, as Joseph did: "*I have done nothing* that they should put me into the hole"—a fact that the butler, to whom he said it, would appreciate all the more if, as I have suggested, he himself had been falsely accused by the baker. Whatever the cause may be, God knows. Only He can correct our mistakes, forgive our sins, and make the injustice of others turn to our good account. The important thing is to adopt St. Paul's example: "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always *a conscience void of offence* toward God and toward men" (Acts xxiv. 16). Then:—

If wronged, misunderstood, thou art,
And pierced by many a cruel dart,
His sympathy shall cheer thy heart.
Be true to God!

"For consider Him—the Lord Jesus—that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your mind" (Heb. xii. 3).

CHAPTER XXII

• JOSEPH

PREMIER AND FOOD CONTROLLER

IT was a big rise that Joseph made, in a single flight, from prisoner to Prime Minister. The Pharaohs were not men who did things by halves. Lavish privileges for favourites, unstinted penalties from delinquents; hearts in fidelity or heads in forfeit—these were clear-cut rules from which none might make appeal; all must toe the line.

So the monarch who was equally facile in honouring his butler or hanging his baker, went great lengths in exalting Joseph, who, by interpreting the royal dreams, had deserved well of the royal pleasure. Nothing was deemed too good for him, as favours followed thick and fast, treading on each other's heels, as it were, in the haste of their bestowal (Gen. xli. 40-45). Chief rulership, second only to Pharaoh himself; a ring from the king's own finger, and a gold chain to adorn his neck; an imposing

procession through the streets as introduction to the populace; a high-born lady for his wife; a name with half-again as many letters as the toes upon his feet; and a public announcement that any who should dare to "lift hand or foot" against the new authority would assuredly be looking for trouble! That was Pharaoh's way of doing things, and the reason for this excessive generosity lay in the explanation of his dreams.

This we learn from Joseph's lips—how the lean oxen devouring the fat ones, and the scanty ears of corn consuming those that were top-heavy with grain, betokened that Egypt was to pass through seven years of great abundance, followed by other seven of exhausting famine. Such a statement was enough to startle any king! Many would have laughed at the warning; some would have locked up the man who uttered it; while others, maybe, would prefer to wait and see, only to learn that their time to see would be their time to starve.

But Pharaoh—high-and-mighty autocrat though he was—discerned in all this the authority in the universe of a Power still mightier than his own. Sensibly he lowered

his flag of pride, and faced the alarming situation with characteristic zeal. No doubt he had already heard tell of the God of the Hebrews. The renown of Abraham had spread far and wide; quite possibly the official records contained allusion to the Divine intervention on the patriarch's behalf during that humiliating visit to Egypt in an earlier Pharaoh's reign (xii. 14-20). But Joseph left nothing to such uncertain chance. He would bear his own witness. Thus his clear and bold assertions—"God shall give . . ."; "God hath showed . . ."; "God will bring to pass . . ." (xli. 16, 25, 28, 32)—impressed upon his royal hearer the Divine purpose that lay beneath those startling dreams. And Pharaoh, wise man, learned his lesson well; which leads us to ask ourselves: Are we always as ready to put into practice *our greater knowledge of God*, as this heathen king was to follow the lesser light he had?

On Rations.

To Pharaoh belongs the proud distinction of instituting the world's first Ministry of Food, with Joseph as Egypt's Food Controller. The story should have a special interest for us, after all we had to learn about rations and regula-

tions during the Great War. Joseph, however, had this advantage over his modern successors—he knew beforehand what was coming, and had seven years in which to formulate his necessary plans. Did it seem to some a hare-brained scheme, to ration a nation when corn was prolific on every hand? Enough that his authority was supreme. No sapient Press-writers were there to air their opinions; Joseph was the only “leader” that any had to read. No clamour for Coalition or the rights of Democracy reached his ears; as a matter of fact he was working the Democratic ticket all the time, though he did not know it or call his labours by that name. Grumblers, no doubt, there were; but still tongues made wise heads. If some would have rebelled, had they dared, none was allowed the chance. And as for profiteers and Bolsheviks, be sure Joseph kept a sharp look-out for them! And, marvellous to relate, in the long run everyone was satisfied and pleased!

The people’s willingness to be rationed largely depended, of course, on their *believing or disbelieving* the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams; as in the case of Noah’s warning of the impending Flood. But whether they accepted Joseph’s

forecast of famine as correct or not, they had to obey his orders about garnering the corn; and men of sense approved the course he adopted, in collecting it from every quarter, allowing only a reasonable quantity to be consumed, and storing up the remainder for the coming years of scarcity.

But God as well as Joseph was at work. For "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job xxxii. 8); and whether man or nation, whoever obeys that holy influence will find God always leads aright. Never before had that generation of the Egyptians had to do with the Almighty consciously in their personal lives. Vastly better off are we. At our disposal lies the teaching of the Bible about His Providence and love. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. ii. 1).

There is always wisdom in *providing for the future years*. For what is true of corn is also true of character. Sparing is never a pleasant experience. It means doing without some things for awhile, and partaking sparingly of others. Yet who can deny the wisdom of it.

if thereby we can stave off something worse, and gain something better by-and-by? Pleasure hours may have to be rationed, but only for later advantage, to stave off idleness and ignorance, and to secure the benefits of a good education. I remember a boy who excused himself for playing truant from school by saying: "Why, there's so much play to be got through, I've got no time for work!" I knew him also when he became a man, and how bitterly he regretted the opportunities of his boyhood that he had thrown away.

Rules and Restrictions.

Like Egypt's "seven years of plenty," there is a period in young life, say, from ten to seventeen, which in every sense is pivotal. It is the time on which the future will depend; a time to lay up stores of knowledge and to develop those traits of character that tend to satisfaction in the needy years to come. It is well worth while, therefore, to put up as cheerfully as possible with all necessary rules and restrictions, disagreeable though they seem, for the sake of the benefits they will yield at a later date. They are not to be regarded as barbed-wire behind which alien captives are

interned, but as a kindly protection for the growing flock which goes in and out and finds pasture. Nor must we forget that highest education of all, embodied in our Lord's words: "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven" (Matt. vi. 20), which makes provision for those eternal years when life on earth is done. For neither slacker nor shirker in this respect can gain entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom.

Two noteworthy tributes to Joseph's character—the one on the spiritual, and the other on what we may term the secular side, were paid by the King to his unique Prime Minister: "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" "Go unto Joseph! What he saith to you, do" (xli. 38, 55). Character and capability again, and each the complement of the other! Was there ever greater need for such than there is to-day? The world is seeking high and low for the first-rank man, yet seeks in vain. None but God can find him; yet God is the last to whom men look for aid amid all the stress and turmoil of conflicting claims. Egypt passed through her years of pain, as Britain has lately done, but God it was who brought her through. Did she celebrate her deliverance with her native

counterpart of a "Victory Derby" and a "Savage Ball"? She may have done, and her ignorance would have been her mitigation. Not so, our favoured land, with her greater light and privilege. Let all who value these, exert a strenuous influence that days of Reconstruction may be reconsecration days—

"Lest we forget—lest we forget!"

CHAPTER XXIII

JOSEPH

GREATHEART'S REVENGE OF LOVE

THE seven plenteous years having come to an end, the days of famine were not far advanced before the land of Canaan also was involved, and Jacob and his family felt the pinch. In sore straits for want of food, they stared with hungry eyes at empty plates. But no satisfaction was derived from that. Practical as ever, the old man roused his sons to action. "It's no use *looking*," he exclaimed querulously; "for goodness sake *do* something! Try Egypt, if everywhere else has failed. There's no sense in sitting here to starve!"—or words to that effect (chap. xlii. 2).

Memories.

Now Egypt was about the last place his sons desired to visit. They hated its very name. Hence it was with sorely disturbed and anxious minds, bestirred with guilty consciences, that

they reluctantly wended their way thither. What memories would fill their minds as they neared the cross-roads and passed the very spot where they had sold their brother a score of years before ! How they would discuss the likelihood of ever seeing him again ! And as they reached their journey's end, would not their furtive eyes be busy, scanning the faces of slaves they met, lest if by any chance this or that one might be he ? And when at last they saw him, not one of them recognised him—how should they, so altered was he in appearance, in age, and especially in position ? But he knew them, and his own emotions were deeply stirred as he looked upon the men to whom he owed directly the greatest sorrows, and indirectly the greatest joys, that had fallen to his lot.

Yet, surprising as it seems, instead of giving them a glad welcome, he “made himself strange (or a foreigner) unto them, and spake roughly” ; and not only spake, but acted so. First he called them “spies,” and locked them up for three days ; then bound Simeon before their eyes, and held him captive while they returned home to fetch their youngest brother Benjamin as a visible proof that their story was not a

fairy-tale. Not that he doubted it, of course, for he knew the family history as well as they could tell it. But so great was his longing to see the only one of his brothers who had never done him any harm, that he adopted the surest way of fulfilling that desire. At heart he was entirely well-disposed towards the ten ; and for all his outward sternness for the time being, his real intention was to load them with far greater benefits than their pettifogging minds had ever dreamed of. But he would not reveal his plans too soon.

In other words, he put them on rations, not of food, but of *his brotherly-kindness and affection* ; meting it out a little at a time until, on their second visit, he lavished it upon them with a prodigality that even the impulsiveness of a Pharaoh could not surpass. But first he had to ascertain if they had indeed repented of their former sin. He was convinced of this when he heard their fatal confession one to another, " We are verily guilty concerning our brother," which they uttered, not knowing that he understood ; for he had spoken to them " by an interpreter," as if he himself were as native as they had taken him to be. He could not carry out his cherished plan unless

they, on their part, were in a spirit worthy to receive the bounty of his heart. So little they deserved; so much it was his purpose to bestow.

As a first instalment he gave them, over and above the corn they had purchased, an extra provision for their journey; and secretly replaced into their sacks the money they had paid; thus making a free gift of all their corn-supply. Alarmed at this discovery, they feared lest they should be pursued and charged with theft. But more surprising things were yet to come. Meanwhile they arrived home, and reported to their father Jacob their strange experiences.

Benjamin.

It needed long persuasion to induce the old father to let his beloved Benjamin accompany them back to Egypt, for his heart was still sore at the supposed death of his long-lost favourite son; and the fact that Simeon had now been detained, added to his fear that he would lose his youngest child as well. Roundly he censured them for revealing that they "had yet a brother" (xliii. 6). In vain did Reuben pledge the lives of his own two boys

that Benjamin should be brought back safe and sound (ver. 37). Stubbornly Jacob resisted all argument. "No," he declared, "my son shall not go"; and that ended the discussion for the time. But what argument failed to accomplish, hunger brought about. An empty sack will not stand for long. So when the new supply of food was all consumed, and he bade his sons go back and purchase more, they flatly refused unless Benjamin went, too. "We shall all die of starvation if you won't give in," argued Judah; "we should have been down to Egypt again and back by now, if you had let us go at once!" (ver. 10).

So Jacob yielded, much against his will. When at last he did so, it was not without a trace of his old bad habit of seeking to win a favour by a bribe—as when, long years before, he had arranged his elaborate present to mollify his brother Esau. "Carry down a present to the man," he urged, "and take double money in your hand" (ver. 11). As if to say: "Every man has his price, and these Egyptian officials are no better than the rest. Each is out for his own profit. Their pockets are more greedy than their hearts are kind!" It takes a long time to convince people who have once been

mean themselves, that there are others who are not so mean as they. It was a despairing blessing with which he sent them forth: "Take your brother and go, and may God Almighty give you mercy before the man!"

Yet how these gloomy anticipations were dispelled (vers. 16-34)! In all history there are few scenes so touching as those that followed the arrival of the travel-stained party, at a moment when apparently Joseph was engaged with some official duties. Instantly detecting Benjamin among the group, he bade his head-steward: "Bring these men home . . . they shall dine with me at noon." Not having heard this instruction, the brothers were filled with dismay at being led off by their guide, they knew not whither; and made a pitiful appeal to secure his favour. "If only we can get him on our side," they thought, "he may influence his master on our behalf." But they might as well have saved their breath. "Don't you worry," was the gist of his unexpected reply; and the next moment Simeon appeared, not bound in fetters, but wreathed in smiles. He and his brothers had never been so pleased to see each other in all their lives before.

The Dream Fulfilled.

"And they made ready the present, against Joseph came at noon." Surely by this time it was a dawning sense of gratitude, not bribery, that stirred their bewildered minds. Things were moving so fast, their slow intelligence was getting left behind—it was not used to being rushed along at such a pace. How little they realised, when Joseph reappeared and "*they bowed themselves to him to the earth,*" that they were fulfilling their long-foretold destiny! Truer than ever were the words they had spoken so maliciously in the old days: "Behold this dreamer cometh . . . We will see what will become of his dreams!" Now indeed the wondering brothers saw, though still they did not understand. "For the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small"; and they had not done grinding yet, for Joseph's rationing scheme was not yet complete.

See him during the interview that followed, trying his best to appear unconcerned and casual as he calmly asked: "Is your father well?"—then they "bowed" again as they replied. "And is this your younger brother?" he inquired once more; and very tender was

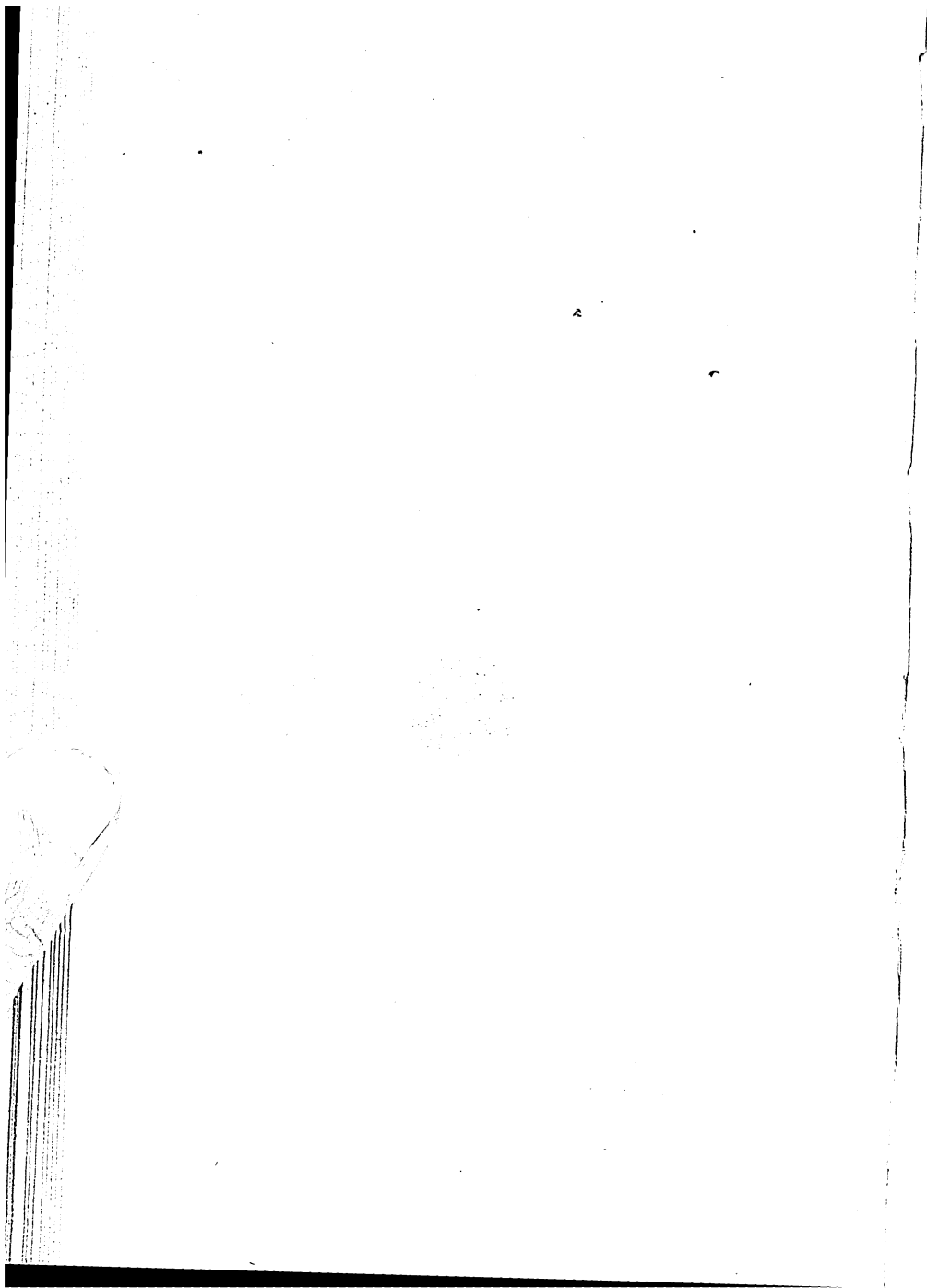
his greeting: "God be gracious unto thee, my son," though it cost him hidden tears to preserve his outward calm.

Yet still he must persist in rationing. The moment was not ripe to reveal the fulness of his love. Once more he must let them set out for home. Then that strange device—the concealing of his own "cup" in Benjamin's sack; the pursuit, and charge of theft; the dismay of the brothers as they returned crest-fallen to plead for the supposed transgressor; Judah's horror at hearing that Benjamin was to be retained as Joseph's slave—and here, to his credit, we observe that Judah's anxiety was greater on his father's behalf than on his own: "His life is bound up in the lad's life; when he seeth the lad is not with us, he will die."

Then Joseph gave up rationing, and let his love full out, as he "made himself known unto his brethren." Sharply he had taught them; bitterly they had learned. And ultimately, not his brothers only, but his father also, joined him in happy and cloudless reunion. Thus for all time this Greatheart tells us that blood is thicker than water, and love is ever mightier than revenge.

Aptly three passages of Holy Scripture come

to mind as we read the memorable story: God "hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. ciii. 10). "I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee" (Isa. liv. 8). He "is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. iii. 20). If we would receive that Divine fulness, we must *let that Divine power work* in our hearts and lives.



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